FOR THEY SHALL BE COMFORTED

AN EXAMINATION OF THE LITURGY, USAGE, AND ADEQUACY OF THE FUNERAL SERVICE IN A NEW ZEALAND PRAYER BOOK (1989) WITH REFERENCE TO THE GRIEF OF THE BEREAVED.

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ABSTRACT

Grief at the death of someone we love is a universal experience although no two people's grief is exactly the same. Lives are changed profoundly by grief, often negatively but sometimes positively. It is the aim of this study to present funerals as a potentially important factor in shaping the outcome of grief.

The funeral is presented as having the main function of assisting the bereaved toward a healthy adjustment to the death of a loved one. The person primarily responsible for creating this focus at a funeral is the religious officiant still common at most funerals in New Zealand. The funeral is viewed as being primarily although not solely a 'pastoral office.'

The work outlines the background against which the funeral in New Zealand can be viewed and gives an overview of the extensive writing on grief. In order to narrow the focus to manageable proportions I concentrate on the Anglican funeral service as laid out in A New Zealand Prayer Book (1989) and practised by Anglican priests in Christchurch and the surrounding districts. This focus is followed through by interviews with sixteen Anglican priests active in conducting funerals. I discuss their assessment of the funeral's ability to assist with the grief work of the bereaved and how in practical terms they achieve this aim. I quote widely from these interviews examining how different aspects of the funeral can assist with grief in both theory and practice.

There are marked differences in the way that Anglican priests conduct funerals and employ the liturgy. Many make additions and omissions to the liturgy while some only use the material provided in the prayer book. The former generally place emphasis on the role of the service in assisting the bereaved with their grief work.

The need for alterations and additions in the liturgy is particularly relevant in the case of bereaved with no strong commitment to Christian

beliefs and practices who use a Christian officiant, content and structure for the funeral of someone close to them.

The existing liturgy needs to be expanded and its structure reworked in order to more fully achieve the aim of assisting with the grief work of all who use the service. This focus by clergy on the personal function of the funeral is essential if the Christian funeral is to become a significant event with a relevance and a worthwhile purpose in our country. Otherwise it will increasingly become an empty tradition lacking in relevance and failing to fulfil its enormous potential.

INTRODUCTION

Blessed are those who mourn for they shall be comforted.

- Matthew 5:4

General Introduction

Death is an inevitable part of life. People we love will die during our lifetimes and eventually we ourselves will die. Regardless of our personal beliefs about what happens to us when we die in terms of our continued spiritual existence, the inevitable physical fact of death is part of being human and cannot be prevented. It is a part of life therefore that all of us will both cause and suffer from the shock, sorrow, anger, and pain, as well as the necessary acceptance and adjustment to death, which is part of the psychological process of grieving for the death of someone emotionally close to us.

An almost universal and ancient human response to death, which archaeological evidence suggests dates back at least 60,000 years to Neanderthal humans, has been some form of burial ritual. Human society, from the earliest times, has evolved rituals which accompany death in an attempt to give meaning to death: the mysterious, fearful and unknown. There is no way of knowing whether these early burials were associated with religious belief although it is quite possible that they had a ritual and mythological significance.[1] At one site the remains of adults and children have been found with flint tools placed near their hands. At Monte Ciceo

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1 Malinowski (1954) is an early advocate of the idea that primitive people were first moved to religious activity by confronting the mysterious power of death. Also James E. O. (1957).

in Italy a skull surrounded by a ring of stones was discovered and in Bavaria a group of skulls was found that had been immersed in red ochre.[2]

It is no coincidence that this, possible early evidence of religious belief and ritual, is associated with death. It is when we are faced with the inevitable termination of life (especially of our own and those that we love) that our most profound questions about the nature of human existence are voiced. It is in part through attempting to answer these fundamental questions about death that humanity has from the earliest times developed religious beliefs and practices.

It is logical, therefore that rituals of departure for the dead are nearly universally performed by a religious official such as a priest or minister of the religion and denomination of the deceased or as is increasingly the case in western societies, where the deceased had no religious affiliation, the ritual is performed by a member of the clergy selected by the chief mourners.

The form that these rituals take is determined by mythological, theological, historical and social factors and varies widely not only between religions but also between religious denominations and even within denominations. Using the Christian context the funeral ritual will be defined, for the purpose of this study, as a service of worship of the Christian Church. It is a formal religious ritual normally conducted by a member of the clergy according to the traditions and practices of the denomination which are often prescribed in a denominational book of worship. The form of the ritual is also dictated by the practices of the local church in the context of the needs of the mourners and the personal style and beliefs of the officiant.

Despite the wide diversity of funeral rituals it is possible to identify two major functions of all such rituals. Firstly: to separate the body of the deceased from the community of the living, and secondly to assist the

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2 Smart (1969) pp. 62-3.

mourners in adjusting to their loss as they go through the grieving process.[3] It is this second function, which will be referred to as the "personal" function of the funeral ritual which will be the focus of this study.[4]

The life of every individual is in part determined by, even made up of, the lives of other individuals. When one life is removed by death it causes emotional ripples which touch many people. When faced with death people's responses vary greatly. Those who had the highest quality and longest relationships with the deceased feel the death most strongly. Responses also vary depending on the timeliness of the death, in terms of the age of the deceased, whether the death was expected, the nature of the death and the survivors' own resources for coping.[5] For some grief is a very intense experience, whereas for others it is rather mild. For some grief begins at the time they hear of the loss, while for others it is a delayed experience. In some cases grief goes on for a relatively brief period of time, while in others it is drawn out.

Every death, however, leaves those who were close to the deceased (the bereaved) at the beginning of an identifiable grieving process. Generally speaking grief goes through a series of stages.[6] These stages should not be seen as stages that a person follows one after the other but rather they are travelled in a kind of ebbing and flowing movement. A person can get stuck at a stage of grieving for a long period of time. The process normally begins with shock and numbness at the time of death . The grief then develops with the most affected being unable to function at the same level as before the loss due to feelings of often overwhelming sadness and states of depression which decline gradually in intensity until they progress to a point where a renewed enjoyment of life and a commitment to start living and rebuilding a life without the deceased is

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3 Pine (1976) p. 34.

4 The psychological function of the funeral is referred to as the "personal function" by Irion (1964).

5 Clinebell (1984) p. 224.

6 The stages of grief are extremely well documented. Refer to Jackson E. (1985), Oates W. (1981), Parkes C. & Weiss R. (1983).

achieved. These stages generally take from three to eighteen months to complete depending upon the variables referred to above.

The funeral itself is only one part, sometimes even a small part, in the whole psychological process of meeting bereavement, yet in practice and certainly potentially the funeral is an extremely significant part of this process. The funeral has the ability to do three things with reference to the grief processes of the bereaved. Firstly, to have no effect upon the process as though the ritual had not happened. Secondly, through a lack of attention to the personal function of the funeral, the ritual can actively hinder movement towards recovery. Thirdly, a well-conducted funeral can be an important step in the healthy movement through the grief process until the experience of bereavement has been integrated as part of a positive and healthy lifestyle.

Nature and Scope Of This Study

It is my aim in this thesis to describe in detail, according to the findings of modern psychology and my own research, the major psychological needs of the bereaved and then to point to ways in which the funeral can potentially meet these needs. I will meet these aims with specific reference to the funeral service in current use in the Anglican Church in New Zealand as set out in A New Zealand Prayer Book / He Karakia Mihinare o Aotearoa (1989) and performed by members of the New Zealand Anglican clergy.

While only an incidental aim of this study, and one that I had not considered at the outset, my interviews with members of the Anglican clergy had the effect of stimulating many of them to think about some aspects of the funeral service that they had perhaps not thought about in much depth before. The reflection my questions evoked may even have resulted in some priests altering aspects of their services for the better in terms of the grief needs of the bereaved (though I have no evidence of this). If I achieve nothing else I consider my efforts a success for this

reason. I also hope that this thesis (and, if requested, any other notes taken in the course of gathering information[7]) will be read by members of the clergy to increase their knowledge about the practices and attitudes of their contemporaries. This is important as most clergy I interviewed, regrettably, attend very few funerals taken by other Anglican priests and so are more insulated from any osmosis of ideas, innovation, and positive change than is desirable or necessary.

The information for this study comes from three main sources. Firstly, from secondary source material where there is a wealth of material written on the subject of bereavement and grief from a number of perspectives ranging from the very personal to the extremely analytical.[8] All have been of some use. There is unfortunately little work that has been done in the area of pastoral care, funerals and the needs of the bereaved. For specific secondary source material in this area I am indebted to the pioneering work of Paul Irion.

Secondly, and most importantly, I have conducted interviews with sixteen Anglican priests active in taking funerals in Christchurch and the surrounding towns, and discussed with them at length different aspects of the personal function of funerals generally and the 1989 Anglican Prayer Book's service specifically. The priests were initially selected at the recommendation of my thesis supervisor but as the interviewing continued, increasingly at the recommendation of other priests. The majority were recommended as people who were competent at conducting funerals and were aware of the need for attention to the personal function of the funeral. One or two, however, were recommended because of conservative stances on funerals and how liturgy should be applied given different circumstances for the bereaved. Others were suggested as younger than the majority who were in their fifties. The majority of those I interviewed worked in parishes in Christchurch although I did interview

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7 Subject to agreements regarding anonymity made with interview subjects.

8 From C. S. Lewis', A Grief Observed, to C Parkes' Bereavement: Studies of Grief in Adult Life.

some in the rural townships around Christchurch for different urban and rural perspectives.

It is a regret that I only interviewed one woman and I acknowledge a possible difference of approach toward the personal function of the funeral between male and female members of the Anglican clergy.[9] Another area of possible criticism was that no Maori or Pacific Island members of the Anglican clergy were interviewed for their perspectives. I have made no attempt to examine in any depth the Maori tangi and how aspects of this ritual affect the personal function of the Maori funeral nor have I examined how the Anglican funeral service fits into this ritual. There is a fertile area for study here in itself and I do not wish to do it a disservice through insufficient coverage.

The third means of collecting information came through attending a number of Anglican funeral services in Christchurch taken by those I have interviewed and others. Observing funeral services first hand has been an invaluable help.

One area where I have not collected information is through interviewing the bereaved directly. This omission is for one reason. There is a real difficulty finding people willing to be interviewed about the death of a loved one and the subsequent funeral service within at least a year of the event. This was something I discovered through attempts by myself and my supervisor to arrange interviews with people who had experienced funerals as mourners, and through my discussions with members of the clergy. This unwillingness is of course entirely understandable. After a year, if the bereaved were willing, it might be possible to arrange an interview. By this time, however, the funeral and surrounding events, in what is a very emotional and painful time, has in many cases faded in their conscious memories to a series of impressions and feelings devoid of specific details. I believe that my lack of primary material in this area is

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9 For a further examination of this issue see Walter (1990) pp. 52 - 59. He acknowledges that there is a difference between the way male and female clergy deal with the personal function of funerals and says that, "We desperately need the female touch at funerals."

compensated for by secondary material on grief reactions plus discussions with clergy on reactions which they have observed to death and funerals both in the short and long term.

Following this introduction this thesis is divided into five chapters. Chapter one provides a multidimensional definition of the funeral discussing social, cultural-anthropological, theological, and psychological perspectives on the funeral. I use these perspectives to outline in general terms the nature of funerals in our society and to establish a background against which the main issues surrounding the personal function of the Anglican funeral can be understood.

Chapter two is an examination of bereavement which focuses on the grief responses of the bereaved at the time of the funeral. This chapter also includes discussion of factors affecting grief responses, and normal and abnormal grief responses plus the long-term effects of grief.

Chapter three presents the argument that the primary function of the funeral is its personal function. Reasons for this stance are discussed and then I examine whether the priests whom I interviewed shared this belief. I also outline how varied opinions on the importance of the personal function of the funeral effected the officiants approach to the service.

Chapter four analyses specific elements of the contemporary Anglican funeral service in New Zealand both as liturgy in the prayer book and as it is practised by clergy. The main aspects of the service for discussion are participation, centring on the deceased through addresses, encouraging realism, and the expression of authentic emotions. With each of these aspects my focus is on how they contribute, both positively and negatively, to the personal function of the funeral.

Chapter five is an examination of what I see as the major controversy affecting Christian funeral services today. Increasingly as

membership of the major protestant churches declines in New Zealand[10] Christian funeral services are being used for the funerals of nominal Christians with nominal Christian mourners.[11] I discuss the acceptability of this from the perspective of the personal function of the funeral and also the response of the clergy in terms of their control of the content of the service for nominal Christians. The question of whether our society needs an entirely new funeral service for the funerals of those increasing numbers of people without any strong commitment to Christian beliefs is also discussed.

My conclusion is an attempt to arrive at general principles useful in the formulation and evaluation of funeral services both generally and the contemporary Anglican service specifically. It also contains a discussion of the implications of a greater attention to the personal function of funerals for the future of that ritual.

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10 New Zealand Year Book 1990, p. 180.

11 'Nominal' Christians refers to people who may be baptised, married and buried in a church and may even worship with a congregation on Christmas day or at Easter. They have a general knowledge of Biblical stories and Christian beliefs but no strong convictions in favour of these beliefs or commitment to living according to the precepts of a Christian denomination.

CHAPTER ONE: DEFINING THE FUNERAL

We loved Bridie in life and wanted to care for her in death. It was the ultimate act of love. We said goodbye with love and dignity.

- Clare Feeley, Bridie's mother[1]

Funeral services are a pastoral 'office' and therefore they are most correctly seen as one aspect of pastoral care.[2] Pattison provides a useful definition of pastoral care as:

> that activity, undertaken especially by representative Christian persons, directed towards the elimination and relief of sin and sorrow and the presentation of all people perfect in Christ to God.[3]

Care of the bereaved certainly falls within this definition and has been an important part of the ministry of the church from the church's inception making up a large percentage of pastoral care cases as a whole. Funerals, however, are only one aspect of pastoral care of the bereaved, which also includes providing practical assistance, human warmth, and counselling both before and for some time after the funeral. Due, however, to the usually traumatic nature of the crisis of bereavement, the important part that the ritual can have in assisting in this crisis, and the fact that the service may be the only contact the officiant has with the bereaved, funerals are a crucial part of pastoral care of the bereaved. In the words of one theological college principal speaking to his students, "Taking funerals may be one of the most important pastoral functions you will ever perform."[4]

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1 On the death of her six month old daughter Bridie. Quoted in 'A Dignified Choice' p. 3.

2 The funeral service may occasionally include the Eucharist when a practicing Christian has died.

3 Pattison (1988) p. 13.

4 Quoted in Ainsworth (1983) p. 125.

Irion (1988) outlines six functions of pastoral care of the bereaved.[5] They are: to assist people to face reality; to support the process of remembering the deceased; to encourage the expression of authentic feelings; to provide a supportive presence; to aid in the reorientation to a new life without the deceased, and finally, to aid in finding a personally satisfying way to give meaning to the death and its consequences. All of these facets of pastoral care of the bereaved can be present in a well-conducted funeral service.

Speaking generally, pastoral care at the funeral is concerned with supporting Christians in times of personal and corporate sorrow and beginning an on-going process of healing using the resources of the Christian faith. As a pastoral office though, funerals are often held for mourners who never normally have dealings with the church and so funerals are an instance when nominal Christians also come under the umbrella of pastoral care and are exposed to Christian perspectives on death and life. The service, therefore, must also contain elements which cater to the needs of those without a strong Christian faith. While funerals are not often overtly regarded as an appropriate time for evangelism in New Zealand, there is an awareness among priests that presenting the Christian message at the funeral is a rare opportunity to present an alternative for consideration by non-Christians or nominal Christians at a time which is particularly poignant. This is a part of the priest's pastoral role of building up the church community.

For the purpose of introduction and in order to narrow the focus of this study to enable more intense treatment, I define the funeral as a service of worship of the Christian church,[6] a formal religious ritual normally conducted by a religious officiant according to the traditions and practices of the denomination, which are often prescribed in a

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5 Irion (1988) p. 177.

6 I appreciate, however, that the few days following the death, the viewing and the burial or cremation cannot be separated from the service itself when talking about the personal function of the funeral. These aspects are discussed in later chapters.

denominational book of worship. The form is further dictated by the practices of the local church in the context of the particular needs of the mourners and the personal beliefs and style of the officiant.

Definitions usually reveal as much about the perspective of the person or group doing the defining as information about the object or event being defined. It follows that when defining an event such as a funeral it may be defined legitimately from a number of perspectives thereby enriching and enlarging our knowledge of it. For this reason I will now broaden and deepen the definition of funerals, maintaining my focus on Christian services and the contemporary New Zealand Anglican service in particular. I will do this by examining four academic perspectives on the funeral; cultural anthropology, social psychology, theology, and psychology.[7] It should be noted that these various perspectives interpenetrate and overlap but each adds unique elements to the total picture of the funeral.

This is not intended to be an exhaustive study of the findings of cultural anthropology, social psychology or theology with regard to funerals.[8] My concern at this stage is to establish a background outlining the nature of funerals in our society against which the primary issues surrounding the personal function of the funeral, and the Anglican service specifically, can be understood.

Cultural anthropology as a discipline is interested in the study of funeral practices of given cultures as a means of developing an understanding of a people and their conception of existence. Anthropology shows the diverse ways by which societies develop belief systems which explain death, and rituals which give social support for expression of some of the emotions that follow bereavement.[9] Bronislaw

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7 This approach and the four perspectives are taken from Irion (1977) p. 89 ff.

8 My treatment of the psychological perspective will, however, be detailed. Refer to Chapter Two.

9 Parkes (1972) p. 159. For anthropological studies of funerals and bereavement see Mead M. (1952) and Volkart (1957).

Malinowski was one of the first anthropologists to hypothesize that early humans were first moved to religious activity when faced with the inexplicable and universal power of death.[10] Confronted by this perceived hostile force burial rituals arose as an attempt to control death and the dead, and so have their origins in fear and awe. While medical science can today explain the cause of death in terms of decreasing cell reproduction producing aging, death still has the power to evoke in most people the same fear and awe. And while Anglican funeral rituals are not generally considered to have any salutary effect upon the deceased they are still very much rituals concerned with explanations.[11]

Christian funeral services not only attempt to explain the nature of death but inevitably outline an entire cosmology based on the Christian understanding of the nature of God as a loving yet judging deity and on the role of Jesus Christ in overcoming sin and death and providing the hope of resurrection. A New Zealand Prayer Book explains, in the introductory note to "Funeral Liturgies and Services in Time of Death" titled "Concerning These Services," that:

> Christians know that Christ has triumphed over death, and that therefore we need no longer fear it. The last event in our lives leads on to something richer.[12]

Our society, however, is far from homogeneous in its religious beliefs. The Anglican funeral service is based on Christian beliefs in a society where the majority of people have at least some religious and moral beliefs that can be traced to Christian influences. However, New Zealand contains a minority of people who attend church on a weekly basis or who practise the teachings of the Christian churches in their daily lives. It would be misleading to attempt to examine our culture and its beliefs through a study of Christian funeral services if it is assumed that the beliefs expressed at the service are necessarily those of the deceased,

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10 Malinowski in Parsons (ed.),(1961) pp. 1189-91.

11 There are some that consider the Anglican Prayers for the Dead an attempt to improve the lot of the deceased. The controversy is outlined in, Buchanan (1980) p. 216.

12 A New Zealand Prayer Book (1989) p. 811.

the majority of mourners, or the culture generally. Increasingly Christian funeral rituals are being used for the funerals of nominal Christians with nominal Christian mourners where the beliefs contained in the service about the nature of God and death are not endorsed strongly, if at all, by anyone but the officiant.

The different religious beliefs and attitudes towards death in our society lead to the proposition that the clergy officiate at two very distinct types of funerals.[13] Firstly the "Religious Funeral" where due to the deceased having lived at least part of their life within the church community, and a belief in the teachings of the church by both the deceased and the main mourners, there is a desire to celebrate the funeral within the context of the beliefs and fellowship of the religious community. This funeral is usually held in a church and lasts between thirty and ninety minutes being more elaborate in its arrangements, and possibly includes such elements as the Eucharist.

The second type of funeral is a "Conventional Funeral." This is a funeral arranged and conducted because it is customary to have some religious rites when death occurs or due to an, often instinctive, awareness of the psychological help that ritual can bring. However, neither the deceased nor the principal mourners have a history of Christian worship or a strong adherence to Christian beliefs. The funeral is normally at the funeral director's chapel or a crematorium and between fifteen and thirty minutes long.[14]

The distinction between the 'religious' and 'conventional' funeral does, of course, reduce an understanding of the motivation and composition of a funeral to generalisations. One of the main difficulties that the clergy face when preparing funerals is that there is inevitably a diversity of religious views, possibly from atheism to strongly Christian,

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13 Irion (1977) pp. 128-29.

14 The length of time is often dictated by the crematorium as they arrange for funerals to follow each other closely.

among the mourners at any funeral. Even at a "religious funeral" where the majority of mourners are Christians of the same denomination there will be a range of opinions on specific issues concerning the funeral, such as prayers for the dead. Another problem with this distinction is that it requires an assessment of the religious beliefs of both the deceased and the mourners. Few members of the clergy are willing to make such an assessment in the light of the complexity of an individual's religious beliefs. The judgement Christian or non-Christian is just too simplistic to be used meaningfully.

The distinction between religious and conventional funerals is, however, useful as the emotional needs of a group gathered for a funeral must for practical reasons be assessed in terms of the needs of the majority. In most cases this will require the officiant to make an assessment of the religious beliefs of the primary mourners and the majority of those others present. However, a funeral that has as its primary concern the personal function will attempt to cater to the emotional needs of individuals in the context of the larger group. This issue and the question of to what degree the bereaved are assisted at the funeral depending on their religious beliefs are examined in Chapter Five, "The Christian Funeral: Who Is It For, Who Does It Help ?"

From an anthropological perspective the Anglican funeral service and Christian funerals generally cannot be studied as a means of understanding religious beliefs or attitudes to death in our society as a whole. These funerals only disclose information about the nature and beliefs of the Christian Churches and Christian communities within our society. The rituals do, however, raise many interesting questions about the social forces which produce the continued widespread use of certain religious rituals such as marriages and funerals in an increasingly secular society.

Social Psychology perceives a funeral in terms of its value for the mourners in the context of the social group of which they are a part. It also views a funeral in terms of its value for the group as a whole. A funeral signals a radical change in the role of the bereaved within the social groups of which they are members, be it a family, peer group, business, or a community. These changes are publicly recognised primarily at the funeral when there is the largest gathering of people to acknowledge the death.

The funeral is the time for the mourners to be recognised by the group as people undergoing an emotional crisis. The community signals through its presence and participation in the ritual, and through the normal social gathering immediately afterwards, both its past relationship with the deceased and also its willingness to accept and support the mourners and their feelings in this time of crisis. There is also an indication at the funeral that when the bereaved are ready they will be accepted back into the community after the initial period of withdrawal that grief often involves. It is debatable, however, whether after the funeral, as individuals, this intention expressed as a group is generally carried out.

This is largely as a consequence of society's attitudes towards death. We live in a culture which is death-denying and ignorant about death, where death is not a conscious part of everyday life and so most of us do not know how to respond to death or the bereaved.[15] This is in contrast to, for example, the Maori culture where death and the deceased are discussed more often and more openly and where the funeral ritual is far longer and more involved. The only deaths most Pakehas are encouraged to think about are those unrealistic deaths of movie stunt-men or the horrible catastrophes in Africa or Asia seen on the news. Our own death or the deaths of those that we love are in many ways a taboo subject

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15 By "culture" I mean Pakeha culture. For a more in-depth analysis of the death-denying nature of American culture but which applies to all Western cultures refer to, Irion (1964), Kubler-Ross (1969), Nichols (1975), and Jackson (1985). For a similar perspective specifically on Pakeha culture in New Zealand refer to the brief article by Mary Hancock.

for discussion or even for conscious thought in our specialised society where most of us no longer even see animals being killed for food.

The denial of death is partly linked to the widespread corrosion of belief in traditional religious doctrines concerning the afterlife. There is uncertainty and, therefore, fear about what death means. Irion offers another part of the explanation for this attitude when he writes that,

> The denial of the reality of death in our culture is closely associated with the tremendous value which our generation places upon youth, vitality and activity.[16]

The elderly, as those least vital and closest to dying tend to be marginalized through our system of nuclear families, confinement in old people's homes, and through their lack of representation in the media. When they are dying they are separated from their families often through long-term hospitalization which denies their families the chance to experience their death. When death does occur the body is quickly taken to the undertaker's premises by strangers where the family have no role in preparing the body for the funeral and normally only view it for a short time if at all. It is also true that improved hygiene and medicine have meant that fewer people die until they reach their eighties or nineties which means that many of us will not experience the death of someone close to us until the death of our grandparents in our twenties or even later. The death of our own parents may not occur until we reach our late forties.

When someone does die and people are forced to face it, however briefly, the death is often surrounded in euphemisms which mask the reality of the event. So and so has "passed away" or is "departed" or merely "asleep." Mr Smith may even be said to have been so careless as to have "lost" a "loved one".

Social conventions also apply other pressures which all thwart the therapy of mourning. Increasingly our society views appropriate lengths of

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16 Irion (1964) p. 70.

time for grieving in terms of days and weeks and so the bereaved are expected to be back on the job and fully recovered often in the same week as the funeral. The bereaved often repress and hide the symptoms of their grief to fit in with these social expectations, at the expense of their mental health. Contributing to this trend is the embarrassment and unease that many people feel around the bereaved. Many bereaved have stories to tell about how they were avoided by everyone from close friends to casual acquaintances for some time after the funeral.

In many ways society places expectations, demands and pressures on the bereaved at the funeral. They are often given a role to perform; the part of the grief-stricken relative or friend. These expectations vary according to several factors one of which is the sex of the bereaved. We live in a society which is still uneasy about the expression of strong emotions from men, although this may be changing in some circles. Related to this is the expectation that women will cry at the funeral and for some time afterwards. Our society also frowns upon very strong public displays of emotion at funerals as are common in some other cultures. If someone does cry loudly, speak in anger, or throw themselves on the casket as an expression of how they are feeling they are hushed and said to have "made a spectacle of themselves". If someone were to seem content and at ease at the funeral they would be seen as grieving "incorrectly". These expectations influence the public display of grief, and generally result in an air of sadness with little physical expression of inner emotions as the norm for bereaved at a funeral, regardless of how they may actually be feeling about the death. This does not acknowledge that responses to death vary greatly, encompassing many emotions including relief and anger and are shaped by a number of complex variables which are discussed in the next chapter. In the interests of healthy grieving, reactions to death in a social context such as the funeral should stem from authentic feelings and not from social expectations. This is particularly true in a society with as much fear and repression of the experience of death as ours.

People's presence and participation at the actual funeral indicates group solidarity which is a source of support and strength for the bereaved. It is always reassuring when our actions and ideas are also those of a wider group. Because even the most devout Christian may suffer a crisis of faith and be unsure of the truth of the Christian message about what has happened to the deceased[17] group participation provides reassurance of the objective truth of their belief about the continued existence in some form of the deceased and the possibility of a reunion. Even if neither the deceased nor the mourners share a prior belief in the Christian hope of a continued existence after death they can gain consolation and support by briefly tapping into beliefs expressed through the liturgy and by the officiant.

Irion adds a further dimension to an understanding of the social psychology of the funeral when he writes that: "The funeral is a ritual which symbolizes the relative indestructibility of the group in the face of death. . . ."[18] Group participation in the funeral affirms for its members that, although the dynamics of the group have changed because of the death, the group itself still exists as a functioning entity.

Considered from the perspective of theology Christian funerals are services of worship based on the Christian theological understanding of humanity's relationship with God, the nature of death and the body of the deceased, and the religious resources available for meeting the grief needs of the mourners. It highlights the Church's emphasis on the theology of a funeral to note that four of the six purposes of a funeral listed by the Church of England Liturgical Commission (1973) specifically deal with theological issues.[19] These are: to commend the deceased to God's care; to proclaim the glory of " our risen life in Christ here and hereafter;" to remind those present of their own coming death and the judgement that

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17 For a very personal account of this see C. S. Lewis's A Grief Observed (1961) p. 21.

18 Irion (1977) p. 100.

19 My own research, a survey by Clinebell (1984) p. 223, and writing by other authors such as Oates (1981), suggest that in the opinion of the majority of priests active in conducting funerals, these purposes of a funeral receive a different emphasis, highlighting the needs of the bereaved.

will involve.[20] Also mentioned was the purpose of making plain the "eternal unity of Christian people, living and departed, in the risen and ascended Christ." The remaining two purposes were to achieve the reverent disposal of the corpse and to offer some consolation to the mourners. This last purpose is achieved in part through the bereaved having faith in the truth of the theological purposes above.

These purposes can be grouped under two theological rationales for the Christian funeral. These are 'benediction' and 'coping'.[21] The Christian hope of resurrection makes it possible to conceive of the funeral in terms of benediction. The disposition of the body at the funeral is a symbol of the deceased having departed from this life and does not mark the end of a person's very existence. This raises the interesting question of the nature of the Christian understanding of death.

There are, of course, a wide variety of interpretations and opinions regarding the biblical stance on life after death for both Christians and non-Christians. These differences exist not only between denominations but between priests of the same denomination and among congregations.

In general terms the Christian understanding of death is firstly, that death is a mystery that cannot be fully comprehended.[22] Some Christians, however, do conceive of death as God's punishment for sins and, therefore, a time of judgement. Death can also be viewed not as punishment but nevertheless as the direct will of God. Most priests I interviewed, however, rejected these overly simplistic views of God, being reluctant to view God as some cosmic chess player. Many expressed horror at a belief in a God whose will it was that a young girl should be attacked and killed or that a father of two young children should die horribly in a car accident. The most common viewpoint which I encountered among members of the clergy was that death is a natural part

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20 Quoted from Buchanan (1980) p. 218.

21 This grouping is taken from Irion (1977) pp. 106-112.

22 Jordan (1974) p. 83.

of life and God's working in the process of death is beyond our understanding.

Later in this thesis I discuss the Christian understanding of life after death as presented in the contemporary Anglican funeral service in New Zealand and the effect that this has on the grief processes of the bereaved. At this point it will be enough to outline the Christian hope of resurrection in general terms.

Central to Christian belief in a life after death are the words of Jesus contained in the Gospel according to John:

> I am the resurrection and the life; he who believes in me, though he die, yet shall he live, and whoever lives and believes in me shall never die.[23]

The reading of this passage has opened Anglican funerals since the 1662 revision and is a part of the opening in the New Zealand service. The nature and means of the eternal life of Christian believers is described in 1 Corinthians 15. Saint Paul writes of a time when Christ will return and the Christian dead shall be resurrected in a spiritual body which will be immortal and imperishable.[24] It is generally understood that there will be a continuity between the earthly and the resurrection bodies even though the actual corpse will probably no longer exist. Paul speaks of Christians who have died as being asleep implying that they are in a state of dormancy awaiting the resurrection. Some biblical passages state that for those who do not embrace Christ during their life, death is the final oblivion.[25]

It was often acknowledged by those priests that I interviewed that their own roughly homogeneous understanding of what happens to the deceased, based primarily on the interpretation of the Bible,[26] differs from

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23 John 11:25,26.

24 1 Corinthians 15:50-54.

25 Romans 6:7,8 & 1 Corinthians 15:57.

26 Even in the New Testament there are apparent contradictions between teachings about the general resurrection and the Ascension of the soul to paradise. i.e. compare Luke 23:43 and 1 Corinthians 15:23.

the majority of bereaved they see at funerals. There exists in our society a widespread understanding of death as an event which separates the earthly body from the spiritual self, normally referred to as the soul. The soul is then generally conceived of as dwelling in a heavenly paradise in the presence of God. Many people believe that this is in fact the Christian understanding of death.

The Christian hope for a new life beyond death is central to the second theological rationale for the funeral; that of assisting the bereaved through the presentation and affirmation of certain religious beliefs. The funeral attempts to alleviate suffering by placing death and life within a structure of meaning. The Christian belief in resurrection and the love of God whose understanding, comfort and strength are presented as available for the bereaved, are the primary beliefs which are intended to aid the bereaved in their grief. These beliefs, especially God's love, are generally outlined to both strong Christian believers and nominal Christians at funerals.

The perspective of psychology on the funeral equates broadly with what I have termed the personal function of the funeral which is the main focus of this thesis. A psychological approach is concerned with the means by which the funeral service assists the bereaved in the clearly defined psychological process of grieving. I, however, prefer to use the term 'personal' function as opposed to psychological function. As a label it is more descriptive of the many ways that the bereaved can be assisted in their grieving, through for example the social and theological aspects of the funeral which I have outlined above, rather than by just referring to the more obvious aspects of the clinical stages involved in the psychological process of grieving. This tends to be the focus of the science of psychology when studying bereavement and funerals. This aspect will be dealt with in depth in the next chapter.

CHAPTER TWO: THE PSYCHOLOGY OF BEREAVEMENT

No one ever told me that grief felt so like fear. I am not afraid, but the sensation is like being afraid. The same fluttering in the stomach, the same restlessness, the yawning. I keep on swallowing.

- C. S. Lewis[1]

Each one of us is part of a complex web of relationships which are central to our perception of ourselves and vital for our emotional and intellectual stability. As babies we define ourselves in terms of our relationship with our parents and as we mature our personalities are shaped, to a large extent, by who we, both consciously and unconsciously, choose to emulate from among those we come into contact with. It is also true that throughout our lives we define ourselves, even more than through our jobs or other activities, according to our close relationships. We say "I am John; son of..., husband of..., friend of..., father of..." We invest a lot of emotional energy, and time, in these relationships which are often, although not always, characterised by the feelings and behaviour commonly referred to as 'love'.[2] When we love, however, we run the risk of losing the object of that love.

Grief is closely related to love. Only a person incapable of loving anyone or anything is likely to be able to avoid grief as it is love which renders us vulnerable to the pain of loss. To be bereaved is to be deprived of a person or object[3] which is loved, and grief is defined as the normal "psychological state characterized by anxiety or mental anguish, which follows or anticipates bereavement."[4] The amount and quality of the

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1 C. S. Lewis (1961) p 5..

2 For an excellent definition and analysis of love and the reasons for loving, which has many implications for an understanding of love, grief, and funerals, see M. Scott Peck's, The Road Less Travelled, especially Part 2.

3 This study focuses on bereavement following the death of a person.

4 Definition by Pine, in Pine (Ed), (1976) p. 106. For review of available data on the biological events that occur during the grieving process - changes in the endocrine, immune, autonomic nervous, and cardiovascular systems see, Osterweiss et al. (1984).

interaction between the bereaved and the deceased, and the love manifest in the relationship, has a direct bearing on the extent of the grief reaction.[5]

It is the purpose of this chapter to outline the findings of the science of psychology concerning the process of grief with particular attention to the time leading up to and including the funeral.[6] So much has been written on the subject of grief that, in this format, such an attempt must be purely introductory. It is, however, necessary to lay this foundation for a discussion of the personal function of the funeral in subsequent chapters, as attention to the personal function demands both a theoretical understanding of grief generally, and a specific understanding of the grief of the bereaved in a given instance. Where it is not practical to go into more detail I have provided references that will facilitate a more thorough study of the process of grief.

Although the grief reaction is an ancient and universal phenomenon the research history of bereavement is very short. The strong emotional response to the death of a loved one is told in many ancient myths and recorded in many historical accounts such as that contained in the Book of Samuel which relates King David's grieving over the death of his son Absalom.[7] The severe long-term nature of some grief reactions was recorded as early as the Middle Ages by writers who called chronic grief "induced depression" and "withdrawal melancholy." Grief also appears as a specific cause of death on a report on causes of death published in London in 1657.[8]

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5 Other factors affecting the extent of the grief reaction are discussed later in this chapter.

6 In the tradition of W. F. Rogers who was one of the first to connect psychological data concerning grief and mourning with Christian doctrine and spiritual resources.

7 2 Samuel 19:1-4.

8 Referred to in Hosking (1985) p. 27.

It was, however, not until this century that a systematic explanation of the psychodynamics of grief was developed. Sigmund Freud expressed in his paper, "Mourning and Melancholia," (1917) the belief that grief is the process by which the bereaved person progressively withdraws the energy that ties him or her to the object of his or her love. This is achieved through the process of 'hypercatharsis' where the bereaved brings to consciousness each relevant memory and, therefore, dispels bound-up energy.[9] In the 1930's Thomas Eliot led the movement among medical professionals for an objective comparative analysis of grief and bereavement. Such a study did not take place, however, until 1944 when Erich Lindemann conducted his pioneering study of 101 bereaved people who attended a bereavement clinic he set up after the tragic fire in Boston's Coconut Grove nightclub.[10] As C. M. Parkes, a psychologist and expert in the field of grief and bereavement, wrote, Lindermann's study "coloured all subsequent thinking about reaction to loss" both in grief's normal form and in atypical or pathological forms.[11]

Lindermann's findings can be summarized in four points: acute grief in response to the death of someone emotionally close is a definite syndrome with identifiable stages; the grief response varies widely between individuals and may appear immediately, be delayed, exaggerated or apparently absent; the grief reaction can become distorted into maladaptive grieving behaviour such as prolonged loss of concentration, isolation or depression; and, through the use of appropriate techniques, maladaptive grieving can be turned into a normal grief reaction that eventually concludes.

Grief is normally presented in psychological studies as progressing in a series of stages. While this approach is useful for clarity and easy analysis it is also misleading. Hosking makes the illuminating point that

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9 Freud, "Mourning and Melancholia" in Standard Edition of Complete Works, Vol. 14, (1957) pp. 239-258. Freud's work on grief and bereavement was elaborated on by Melanie Klien.

10 Lindemann, American Journal of Psychiatry, 1944, p. 147.

11 Parkes (1983) p. 13.

while there is a common pattern that most who grieve work through these stages are not entered into in strict order one after the other but are travelled in a "kind of ebbing and flowing movement". There is infinite variety possible in the exact course the journey takes depending on many variables which will be discussed shortly.[12] C. S. Lewis describes the course his personal journey took in his account of grieving, A Grief Observed.

> Grief is like a long valley, a winding valley where any bend may reveal a totally new landscape. As I've already noted, not every bend does. Sometimes the surprise is the opposite one; you are presented with exactly the same sort of country you thought you had left behind miles ago. That is when you wonder whether the valley isn't a circular trench. But it isn't. There are partial recurrences, but the sequence doesn't repeat.[13]

It must also be kept in mind when dealing with the topic of grief and bereavement that no two people grieve in exactly the same way. Oates sums this up when he writes:

> You grieve differently from other people - not so differently that you cannot find fellowship in suffering with them, yet so differently that no one else's grief is exactly like your own. The loss you have sustained is your particular loss, and your grief is your particular grief.[14]

Keeping in mind the diversity of responses to bereavement, and the non-linear nature of the process, it will be useful to look at the grief process in terms of stages. There are many models of the stages of grief. Broadly speaking, there are two approaches which distinguish these models when they examine the early stages of grief.[15] Firstly the approach taken by Westberg (1962), Irion (1964), Hosking (1985), and others, which describes the stages of grief primarily in terms of the bereaved's emotional response at each stage and how this response is manifested.[16] Oates (1981), however, is representative of those who analyse the early stages of

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12 Hosking (1985) p. 4.

13 C. S. Lewis (1961) pp. 50 - 51.

14 Oates (1981) p. 15.

15 The two approaches converge when discussing the recovery stages of the process.

16 Hosking (1985) pp. 4-6.

grief primarily in terms of the cognitive processes which the bereaved go through.[17] There is, however, considerable overlap in these approaches as the emotional and the cognitive response to bereavement are intimately linked.[18]

Most models present between six and nine stages which the bereaved work through in a normal grief reaction. These stages, it is generally agreed, are moved through in a period that varies from three or four months to three years.

It is also generally agreed that the first stage of grief is usually shock which begins upon learning of the death, and especially the unexpected death, of a loved one. This is an entirely normal and appropriate response designed to protect the bereaved from the psychological damage that immediate awareness of all the implications of the news would have. Shock manifests itself in many ways but usually is characterized by feelings of being mentally numb and insulated from reality so that concepts and emotions, and even time, are experienced as though second-hand. This condition lasts for minutes or several hours or even, in some cases, for a day or so. The continuation of this state for over twenty-four hours in some instances means that it is in this condition that the bereaved often attend to many of the practical arrangements for the funeral. This has implications, which are discussed in the next chapter, for the clergy as they try to ascertain what is best for the bereaved in terms of the arrangements for the funeral.

Hosking lists the second stage of grief as that of emotional release.[19] This stage is usually characterized by tears, sobs, and wailing which occur in waves or as what Parkes, writing on the same experience, calls "pangs of grief." This is:

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17 Oates (1981) p. 102.

18 For an example of someone who combines the two approaches see Parkes (1972).

19 Hosking (1985) p. 5.

> an episode of severe anxiety and psychological pain. At such a time the lost person is strongly missed and the survivor sobs or cries aloud for him. Pangs of grief begin within a few hours or days of bereavement and usually reach a peak of severity within five to fourteen days.[20]

According to Hosking these episodes usually last between twenty minutes and an hour each time they occur.[21] They are characterized by overwhelming feelings of loss, anger, and panic. The bereaved is restless and has difficulty concentrating and constantly returns to thoughts of the deceased. Oates elaborates on the cognitive processes taking place at this stage when he writes that the bereaved struggles between fantasy and reality as areas of less conscious thinking still respond as though the loved one were alive. When the conscious mind realises the mistake this results in episodes of psychological pain.[22] Episodes like this may occur in nearly all the stages of the grief process though not usually with the same intensity as the early pangs.

Stages of grief following this occur after the funeral. It is not within the scope of this thesis to examine the continuing pastoral care of the bereaved after the service except with reference to how the events of the funeral have an continuing impact on the grief process and so affect long term pastoral care .[23]

A state of depression is Hosking's third stage of grief characterized by feelings of despair, an inability to initiate activity, make decisions or concentrate. His fourth stage is panic arising from the inability to think of anything but the deceased and related topics which slowly leads into a gradual acceptance of the death and hope for the future which is Hosking's fifth stage. The final stage of grief is when the bereaved fully commits to new causes and individuals and reaffirms a commitment to old relationships. This does not mean they forget the deceased entirely, "but

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20 Parkes (1972) p. 39.

21 Hosking (1985) p. 5.

22 Oates (1981) p. 102.

23 For fuller coverage of these stages of grief see Hosking (1985), Oakes (1981), Parkes (1972).

distil what was essentially important in the relationship and reinterprets it so as to meet the new future. You give up the person - without giving up what he or she meant to you."[24]

While it is useful, and true to the experience of the bereaved, to think of grief as going through stages it is particularly useful to this thesis to discuss the major feelings of the bereaved at the time of the funeral. This is the approach adopted by Irion who discusses seven major feelings characteristic of the bereaved at this time.[25] The bereaved may experience all, a few, or possibly none, of these feelings at the funeral and in the early stages of grief depending on factors discussed shortly.

The most obvious response to the death of a loved one, which has been discussed already, is a 'pang' of great misery, which is likely to recur at the funeral service, and which is expressed through tears and weeping. Further to this the bereaved often suffer from feelings of bewilderment and loneliness because the death represents an often drastic disruption of their concept of self and their purpose in life. Bereavement also produces a response of fear in many people which can exist for one or more of three reasons. Firstly, because people are naturally afraid of the future and their ability to cope. They are afraid of the loneliness, feelings of loss, insecurity, and other feelings which they may associate with grieving. It is this fear of grief which often compels people to try and avoid the work involved in moving through the whole grief process and which can lead to forms of chronic grief. Secondly the death of a loved one brings people face to face with the "fundamental ontological fear" of death.[26] People are naturally afraid of the mystery of death, and increasingly so as 'church based' explanations of death are rejected and yet are not replaced by any firmly held beliefs about the nature of the after-life. Bereavement forces people to face this fear as they inevitably contemplate their own mortality.

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24 Quotation from Simpson (1979) p. 256. also see Worden (1983) under the heading "The tasks of grieving", and Nichols (1975) p. 96.

25 Irion (1964) pp. 43-56.

26 Irion (1964) p. 48.

Related to this is a fear of the body of the deceased. Not only is it a reminder of the condition we will all be in eventually but the foreignness of a corpse in our death-denying culture, and the inevitable linking of death and corpses with ghosts, zombies and forces of evil inspired by television, movies and books all result in fear. We live in a very story telling oriented society where we are constantly subjected to stories that stimulate our imaginations and allow us to recall, and create, many frightening scenarios centred around the dead.

The bereaved may in some circumstances experience feelings of ambivalence towards the death, the deceased, or the funeral. These feelings may exist as a result of ambivalent feelings in the relationship prior to the death and the often minor feelings of relief and hope for the future following the death exist simultaneously with feelings of sadness. Another situation which might produce ambivalent feelings could be the death of an elderly or badly injured person after a long drawn-out illness where the death is in some respects welcome. These ambivalent feelings may be a source of guilt and hostility.

The bereaved may feel hostile toward the deceased, and by extension toward some aspects of the funeral, as a continuation of ambivalence in the relationship or they may be angry because the loved one died and so effectively withdrew their love from the relationship. Anger at the deceased may also exist because he or she died leaving important financial or emotional matters incomplete. This hostility may be directed at others such as the doctor, especially in the case of a sudden accident, or at the officiant at the funeral or even at friends.

The bereaved also frequently experience feelings of guilt. These may result from feeling negative about ambivalent feelings resulting from the death. Ambivalence or anger at the deceased for whatever reason does not correspond with what our society views as an 'appropriate' reaction to grief and so the bereaved feel such thoughts are 'wrong.' Guilt may also arise from a perception that they did not show enough

appreciation or love for the deceased while they were alive or from saying "if only I had..." and therefore seeing themselves in some way responsible for the death, especially in cases of sudden accidental death.

Another feeling characteristic of the bereaved is idealization. There is a natural tendency for the appreciation of a person's good qualities to be taken to extremes at their death. At her death a rude, difficult, angry woman may be spoken of only in terms of being a loving, supportive friend, wife and mother. This may be due to ambivalent feelings towards the death by the bereaved resulting in guilt and an attempt to compensate by speaking and even thinking of the deceased only in positive terms. There is also a taboo in our society against speaking and even thinking ill of the dead. This reality-avoiding behaviour by some bereaved people can be psychologically unhealthy.

Much has been written on the factors which influence the intensity and outcome of grief. Once again the scope of this study does not allow a full discussion of all these considerations. I will, however, attempt an introductory survey of the material as these factors have a direct bearing on the personal function of the funeral.[27]

The nature and depth of the relationship between the bereaved and the deceased is the most obvious shaper of the extent and course of the grief reaction. I have already written of the relationship between love and grief and also the effect that ambivalence in a relationship has on the grief reaction. Further to this it is possible to distinguish at least three groups of survivors who have varying degrees of needs and emotional responses to a death.[28] Firstly, the 'primary survivors': the spouse, children, brothers and sisters or parents. These people normally display many of the symptoms of acute grief such as feelings of irretrievable loss, physical distress, disorientation, anger, and short-term denial of the reality

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27 For more detailed information see: Hosking (1985) pp. 9-10; Oates (1981) pp. 16-19 and 103; Clinebell (1984); Parkes (1983).

28 Keith, in Pine (ed), (1976) pp. 41-48.

of the death. 'Secondary survivors' encompasses intimate friends of the deceased, who usually show some signs of acute grief such as feelings of loss and hostility but probably not severe disorientation or physical symptoms unless the relationship was very close. Social and business acquaintances are referred to as 'tertiary survivors' and suffer none of the feelings of acute grief with the possible exception of denial if they try and get on with their lives acknowledging the death as little as possible.

Those whom custom defines as the 'primary survivors', that is relatives, may not, however, be the survivors with the most acute grief needs. There are many conceivable circumstances which produce acute grief reactions in close friends of the deceased equal or greater to that of the relatives. It is an important issue with reference to grief and funerals that often close friends have to stand aside at the time of the funeral and miss out on a full and healthy involvement in the funeral ritual through participation in the decision-making process. This may in turn result in them having less participation in the actual service than they desire. When talking about this issue Folta writes that society:

> considers interest in the deceased other than by kin as infringement upon family rights and prerogatives and any say in funeral or burial arrangements is considered an intrusion on the sanctity of the family.[29]

Ainsworth suggests that there are two psychological processes which operate within marriages and close relationships which have an impact on the grief process.[30] The first is the psychological process of 'projection' which operates within some relationships allowing each individual autonomy and distinct roles within that relationship. Survivors of this type of relationship cope in healthy ways with bereavement because they are secure in their autonomy. In the second common type of relationship the process of 'identification' means that neither partner can tolerate differences between them and they are seldom apart. The

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29 Folta, in Pine (ed), (1976) p. 237.

30 Ainsworth (1983) p. 103.

survivor sees him or herself as having little worth as a separate individual and so experiences grief strongly and for long periods, and deals with the experience in unhealthy ways such as repressing their grief and quickly entering another similar relationship.

This raises the obvious point that the personality of the bereaved, as shaped by their life experiences, is a significant factor in determining the nature of their grief response. It is personality which determines what type of relationships we form and so, in part, the nature of our particular grief.[31] Our response to bereavement is also partially determined by previous experience of death. A childhood loss of a significant person, especially, can influence the grief response either positively or negatively depending on the circumstances. The degree of religious faith and the consequent participation in religious rituals to mark the death also influence the grief response as does previous mental illness, especially depression, and the occurrence of any life crises, such as divorce, immediately prior to being bereaved.[32]

Related to the issue of personality is the influence of demographic factors such as age, gender, socio-economic status (influencing education, and access to grief support services such as expensive counselling). While much has been written on grief there is still much to be done in determining the influences these factors have on the grief reaction.[33] One area, however, where a lot has been written is the effect of bereavement on children and adolescents and the way in which western societies deal with children at the time of death. One writer calls the intensity of the death taboo as it relates to children "a taboo within a taboo."[34] Bereavement in childhood can have lasting implications for a person's entire life and so the issue of how to deal with bereaved children is a

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31 Irion (1964) pp. 58-60, lists three types of personalities which lead to different types of relationships and different grief responses.

32 Hosking (1985) p. 9.

33 For further information see Hosking (1985) p. 10., Parkes.(1983) p. 18-19.

34 Gilbert Kliman, quoted by Shadick, in Pine (1976) p. 265.

crucial one.[35] As bereavement is linked to cognitive development any child's model of mourning must take the stage of their development into account.[36]

The manner of death also has an important impact on the extent and nature of the grief process at the time of the funeral and afterwards. If a death is anticipated, normally as a consequence of illness or aging, there is time to mentally rehearse and come to terms with the impending death and its consequences.[37] Raphael discusses three main types of anticipated death, all of which influence the nature of the psychological problems the bereaved work through.[38] A death which results from old age through the gradual failure of the bodily functions is perhaps the "easiest" of all deaths to come to terms with as it is seen as the most natural death. A more common form of anticipated death is the death of an elderly person through the disease or some other sudden major disruption of the bodily functions. The bereaved often blame the disease and not the natural process of aging but the events leading up to the death where they suffered for and with the patient may help the survivor with any possible feelings of guilt. The third form of anticipated death and the most traumatic for the bereaved is untimely death by disease. The most sinister and common death of this type is death by cancer. The bereaved are often left bitter about the disease and its effects on the dying person together with the feeling that the deceased was cheated of a portion of their lives.

Dying by old age and elderly death by ill-health are what Schulz calls "low grief deaths."[39] A low grief death is characterized by normal intense separation anxiety at the news of the death followed, within a

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35 See article by Shadick in Pine (1976).

36 See Hosking (1985) pp. 73-76 and 82.; Raphael (1984) pp. 74-113.; Worden (1983) pp. 97-106.; and the article by Shadick in Pine (ed), (1976).

37 'Anticipated' is defined by Parkes (1983) p. 58, as having at least two week's warning of the impending death.

38 Raphael (1984) pp. 24-25.

39 Schulz (1978) pp. 139-142.

period of time appropriate to that person, by a mental relinquishing of the deceased and a full and healthy reintergration into life. Schulz distinguishes between this and a "high grief death" which normally involves sudden, unexpected deaths as a result of an accident, homicide, suicide, or rapidly degenerative medical conditions such as heart failure or cot death.[40] Parkes writes that in these circumstances individuals:

> did not disbelieve what they were told, but they were unable to grasp its full implications. They seemed to be warding off unbearable mental pain. As they came to accept the reality of their loss, they entered into intense, deep grief. There was, then, in many cases, a stubborn persistence of this grieving, as though it would not be relinquished.[41]

Unexpected death often leaves the bereaved with a long term sense of unreality about the death, as distinguished from normal transitory avoidance. As a result they may avoid situations which confront them with the reality of the death. The bereaved may also experience guilt feelings of "if only. . . . ". They may also have a strong feeling of anger and a need to blame someone for what has happened. Unanticipated death may also leave the bereaved with feelings of helplessness in what comes to be perceived as a hostile and uncontrollable world. Frequently, after an unexpected death, the bereaved are left with feelings of unfinished business with the deceased especially if their last piece of interaction was negative in some way. This feeling can further complicate and prolong the grief process.[42]

In concluding this section it is worthwhile introducing the idea of the consequences of arrested and other forms of unhealthy grieving usually referred to as 'chronic' grief. This serves as a reminder of the importance of effective pastoral care for the bereaved, through attention to the personal function of the funeral, and also through the other forms of pastoral care.

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40 'Unexpected' death is defined by Parkes (1983) p. 58. as less than two weeks warning of a fatally ill loved one before death occurred and less than three days warning of immanent death.

41 Parkes (1983) p. 57.

42 For further information on the grief reaction to unexpected grief see: Worden (1983) pp. 84-86.; Oates (1981) pp. 51-53 and 59-64.; Parkes (1983).

Due to three major determining factors: sudden, unexpected bereavements; initial reactions of anger and / or self reproach, and reactions of intense yearning often associated with survivors of dependent relationships, the grief process can become distorted and maladaptive. Chronic grief is characterized by long-term yearning for the deceased, withdrawal from society, low self-confidence, and feelings of helplessness. In addition to these symptoms chronic grief is associated with anxiety, tension, restlessness, self-reproach, and anger, as well as insomnia. Case studies indicate that these symptoms can persist for many years, significantly reducing the survivor's quality of life in all areas. Chronic grief is also associated with physical ill health both minor and severe and is a contributing factor in a significant percentage of admissions to psychiatric hospitals.[43]

Having outlined the relationship between love and grief, the stages of grief, feelings typical of the bereaved, and factors which affect the nature and course of the grief response, it is now possible to move on into discussing how funerals can help the bereaved deal in healthy ways with responses to grief raised in this chapter.

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43 For a fuller analysis of chronic grief see Parkes (1983), Chapter 6. For case studies, pp. 138-142.

CHAPTER THREE: THE FUNCTION OF THE FUNERAL

Funerals are for the living, to help them come to terms with the loss of someone they've had close to them for a period of time . . . to help them start into the grief cycle, to help them come to terms with the grief and work through it.[1]

- An Auckland funeral director

Sorrow, like a river, must be given vent, lest it erode the bank.

- Mexican proverb

The primary function of the funeral is to aid the bereaved towards a healthy adjustment to the death of a loved one. The overriding concern of the funeral must be its "personal function." All other functions must be secondary to, and where possible assist with this. This chapter puts forward an argument for the personal function of the funeral being considered the primary function and lays the foundation for the following chapter which examines some ways in which the psychological needs of the bereaved can be met at the funeral.

Until this century most people would have said that the funeral is performed on behalf of the deceased, either as a way of helping them on to the next world or of paying them respect. The strong focus on helping the deceased in the Catholic Church through prayers, special Mass for the dead, and indulgences was done away with by the Protestant churches during the Reformation. This century has also seen the major Protestant churches reduce their emphasis on hell as the punishment for sinners. Funerals, and especially funeral sermons, often acted as a warning to the living. Today, however, this message is thankfully seldom heard from officiants at funerals. These two changes played a significant part in the major change in emphasis that can first be identified in the 1920s. It was

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1 This quote is taken from an Auckland funeral director referred to only as 'Ray' during the phone-in section of "Reflecting On Life." From the episode entitiled "Saying Goodbye - Funerals", June 23, 1991, T.V.N.Z.

at this time that the major Protestant churches began emphasising the funeral to a significant degree as an event to comfort the bereaved.[2] This emphasis can be seen clearly in the more personalised approach of the 1928 Anglican funeral liturgy and was reflected in clerical training and practices at funerals.

My emphasis on the personal function of the funeral is founded in an awareness that the death of a loved one produces in the bereaved psychological needs which can be met at the funeral. As discussed in the previous chapter the major feelings of the bereaved at the time of the funeral, and subsequently, give rise directly to psychological needs which can be met at the funeral. Whether or not these needs are met can have a significant impact on the grief process as it continues after the funeral. It must, however, be remembered that, as the reaction to bereavement is unique to every individual, the impact the funeral has on the grief process is difficult to assess in general terms. The reactions are, however, not so diverse so as to prevent an awareness of common threads which can be examined to increase our understanding of the relationship between the grief process and funeral rituals.

There are divergent opinions about the significance of participation in funeral rites and whether participation has a positive impact on the resolution of grief. By 'participation' it is inferred that the bereaved will have some say in the funeral arrangements, will attend the funeral service and will actively take part in the service as much as they are able and as much as the service allows. In most cases they will also attend the burial or cremation.[3]

Some sources, such as Vernon, argue that social forces restrict the bereaved to expected behaviour patterns at the funeral and that the need for conformity to norms of social behaviour minimises the positive impact

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2 Walter (1990) p. 97.

3 Although there is a growing tendency in Church funerals to have the entire service including the committal in the church with few if any of the bereaved attending the cremation.

which the service has on the grief process.[4] Another criticism, expressed by Parkes, is that the funeral service normally takes place within three or four days of the death and that this is too soon to be of any great psychological value to the bereaved.[5]

The vast majority of studies on this topic, however, concur that the funeral is a significant event in the grief process of the bereaved and that those who participate in a funeral rite generally have fewer problems adjusting to the death than those who do not take part.[6]

This finding was supported by my interviews with members of the Anglican clergy in and around Christchurch. I asked all the priests whom I interviewed was what they believed to be the primary functions of a funeral. The vast majority answered in terms of how the funeral could meet the psychological needs of the bereaved. Typical of their response to questions about the functions of the funeral was this reply.

> I always say to bereaved families that the funeral service serves a number of purposes. One is that we need to dispose of a body in a dignified way . . . the second is we need to acknowledge the feelings and the grief of the bereaved family or persons so that they are able to work through a process of grief.

Another responded by saying that the funeral is primarily:

> To help the family come to grips with the loss and do some healthy grieving, and to mark for the family and the friends the end of this period of life and the beginning of a new period.

And another said the same things but with a greater flair for visual imagery. He said that the funeral:

> Gives people a framework to let Jill or Joe go. I mean you could just pop them in a blue bag to be picked up on a Monday.

A similar idea was expressed by another who said that the funeral has the ability to,

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4 See article by Schwab in Pine et al.(1976)

5 Ibid.

6 For major works written by those involved with pastoral care that have as their basis the idea that funerals are psychologically beneficial, refer to Irion (1964) & (1977), Oates (1976) & (1981), Clinebell (1984). For studies by or using the work of psychologists see articles by Fulton, Irion and Folta in Pine et al. (1976).

> By the nature and tone, the tenor of the funeral service, allow them (the bereaved) to go back into life somehow with a ground work of being able to face life without the one they've lost.

The primary aim of the funeral most commonly expressed by the interviewees was assisting the bereaved to adjust to the death. It was, however, clear from my observation of funerals, and through information gained in interviews, that in practice far more can be done to achieve this aim in the funeral services taken by Anglican priests in Christchurch, and I would assume throughout the whole of New Zealand. I agree with the priest who told me that, " services so seldom work in any deep way," especially for the bereaved. In a service that 'worked' he told me you can

> feel an energy of human feelings and of human movement; there is a charged feeling and a sense of discharge.

The short-fall between the clergy's perception of the primary function of the service, the liturgy of which is set out in A New Zealand Prayer Book (1989), and achieving that function in practice exists for several reasons: the funeral is in some cases being used inflexibly without adequate attention to the variety of needs of the bereaved; inadequacies in the structure and content of the service as set out in the current prayer book[7] and lack of focus on the personal function of the service by some clergy officiating at funerals. Attitudes prevalent in our society also contribute to the failure to fully realise the full potential of the personal function of the funeral. This is especially true of the 'stoicism' widely regarded as appropriate at funerals. This will be discussed later in this chapter.

Even among those relatively few priests whom I interviewed there was considerable variety evident in the way they employed the funeral liturgy as it exists in the prayer book. Some always used the entire service as it is set out selecting whatever options they saw as appropriate where options are provided or additions indicated. These funerals are the most inadequate at fulfilling the personal function of the funeral. That is not to

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7 These are discussed in Chapter Four.

say that the clergy who conduct their services in this way are insensitive to the needs of the bereaved. Without altering much in the funeral liturgy they normally try to maximise the personal function by " drawing out the potential" in the liturgy and using the options provided to "highlight the core concerns" in different circumstances.

Using funeral liturgy in this way, however, minimises the flexibility of the service's response to the varied circumstances and needs of the bereaved not only between separate funerals but within any given service. Varied circumstances and needs among the bereaved require a variety of amendments and additions in all aspects of the funeral to enable the service to minister effectively to the needs of the bereaved. One priest told me that:

> The priest signs a declaration saying that they will use the forms of the Church of the Province of New Zealand and none other but I don't know a priest in the Church who will abide by that. We use all sorts of things that will help them (the bereaved) because it's a pastoral situation. It's a 'pastoral office' and it's really for the living so whatever helps; readings other than scripture, poems written by members of the family, pieces of music. . . .

The need for this type of flexibility exists most strongly in the large percentage of funerals taken by priests where most of the bereaved are only nominal Christians.[8]

Many priests recognise the need for a large amount of flexibility and variety in the funeral service and are prepared to "change things and miss things out" and "adjust and insert" in order to make the service as meaningful and as helpful as possible for the bereaved particularly where nominal Christians are the principal bereaved. One priest who was of this opinion said:

> You have to do quite major surgery to the service to provide something that actually speaks to where those people (nominal Christians) are at.

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8 Discussed further in Chapter Five.

Another spoke of the need for alterations and additions to the service to deal with circumstances such as suicide or death by misadventure. He said:

> I wouldn't hope you would quote me to the Bishop but I am quite happy to call in other resources to deal with special circumstances . . . I think it (the funeral liturgy) makes a good stab at it but I think there are other prayers in other places.

In the majority of cases where priests adopted this approach they retained the basic format of the service as laid out in the 1989 Prayer Book.

One priest who was unique among those whom I interviewed but who is no doubt not alone in his approach rejects the Prayer Book service almost entirely, mainly on the grounds that it does not adequately meet the needs of the majority of bereaved.

> . . . it always seems to me to be a plastic type of expression, a stereotyped expression of something which I don't think is always where people are. There are some things which I have taken, one or two things like the times of silence to recall the person . . . but I don't really think it speaks to where people are in the majority of cases.

These differences in approach to the funeral raise questions about the role of the Christian clergy as officiants at funerals and the role of liturgy generally. With regard to the nature and function of liturgy F. H. Brabant makes the point that:

> All liturgical acts - whether they make use of words (ritual in the narrower sense), or of actions (ceremonial proper) - have a double function: one directed Godwards, expressing in outward form the thoughts and feelings of the worshippers, the other directed manwards, teaching the worshippers how they ought to think and feel by setting before them the Church's standard of worship.[9]

Brabant defines these as the difference between the 'expressive' and 'impressive' aspects of liturgy. Those members of the clergy who alter the funeral liturgy, in often quite major ways, in order to make it serve the needs of the bereaved view the funeral primarily in 'expressive' terms.

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9 In Clarke (1932) p. 12.

The service seeks to reflect what the bereaved are feeling and draw out memories of the deceased and, therefore, aid in the process of healing.

In line with some priests' understanding that the funeral is primarily a pastoral office the emphasis that Brabant gives to directing feelings Godward is altered. The feelings of the bereaved are expressed for the sake of the people expressing them and directed at the bereaved themselves more than at God. Of course at a religious funeral many mourners may well direct their thoughts and words at God especially through prayers and, therefore, gain support with their grief. In this circumstance the content of the liturgy may remain largely unchanged. At the conventional funeral, officiated at by a pastoraly minded priest, the expressive element of liturgy is something aimed at easing the sorrow of the bereaved. This is largely achieved by taking the focus of the funeral away from the relationship between God and humanity, and placing it on the individual bereaved and their relationships with the deceased. This can only be done through alterations to the existing liturgy as in order to achieve this much of the specifically Christian content needs to be altered and the whole service needs to be made more personal to the bereaved.

Clergy who regard the primary focus of the funeral as its personal function do see the funeral liturgy as having an 'impressive' function also. The service seeks to guide the bereaved toward attitudes and ways of thinking about the life of the deceased which will assist them with their grief. Most of my interviewees agreed that the existing liturgy achieves this well for Christians. It fails, however, to meet the needs of the nominal Christians who make up the majority of primary bereaved at funerals because they cannot relate to the overtly Christian concepts contained within the liturgy.[10]

This brings me to the second part of the argument as to why the personal function of the funeral should be seen as the primary function.

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10 Discussed further in Chapter Five

This argument focuses on the role of a specifically Christian officiant at the funeral.

The priest has a crucial role in planning and conducting the funeral. To borrow a term from the theatre the officiant is a type of "artistic director" who is not only responsible for arranging many of the practical details of the funeral ensuring that the service is meaningful and helpful for the bereaved but he or she also has to lead the service.

It is a daunting task to be faced with a varied group of distressed people about whom the priest may know very little and try to assess their needs and then arrange a meaningful funeral ritual. In order to achieve this successfully the priest must know precisely what he or she hopes to achieve through the funeral and then construct a service that seeks to achieve those aims. Form follows function and without a clear understanding of the functions of the funeral the form will inevitably be disjointed and ineffectual.

In further support of an emphasis on the personal function of the funeral being its primary function I add that members of the Christian clergy are in the business of 'being loving'. In the day-to-day practicalities of teaching, preaching, organizing, worship and counselling there is one fundamental aim. This aim is to help people experience love both as something which is received and as something which they give.[11]

This love has as its basis what Pattison describes as, "a sense of being rooted, grounded in, and orientated towards God . . . " and finds its direction and means of expression through "a Christian vision" based on the life and teachings of Jesus Christ. Arguably the most important New Testament statement on love attributed to Jesus is in Mark 12:28-32. When Jesus was asked to say what was the first commandment he spoke of love and said:

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11 Adapted from a definition of pastoral care by Campbell in Pattison (1988) p. 16.

> . . . you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your mind, and with all your strength. The second is this, You shall love your neighbour as yourself. There is no other commandment greater than these.

No one has ever arrived at a truly satisfactory definition of 'love' because 'love' is too large and diverse and mysterious to ever adequately be captured in words. The effort to formulate a definition, while inevitably incomplete, is, however, necessary for Christians committed to 'loving' service. One attempt at defining 'love' by M. Scott Peck, which has been mentioned already, is very relevant to this discussion of Christian love, the role of the clergy, and the personal function of the funeral. Peck defines 'love' as; "the will to extend one's self for the purpose of nurturing one's own or another's spiritual growth."[12]

When explaining his use of the word 'will' Peck distinguishes between the desire to be loving inspired by feelings of love, and actions which are loving. Many people desire to be loving and have feelings which they refer to as love but these people do not always practice being loving. They may in fact be extremely selfish and destructive to those towards whom they feel love. It follows that feelings of love and a desire to be loving are not by themselves love. Love, in any true and meaningful sense, is an active process which necessarily combines the feelings and desire to love with actions which demonstrate those feelings.

The argument that true love is an active process finds support in the life and teachings of Jesus Christ as contained in the Bible. It is hazardous, however, to construct a simple picture of the life or moral teachings of Jesus from the New Testament as it contains a wider variety of portraits and interpretations of Jesus and his teachings than is commonly understood. While the command to love appears in all the major writers careful analysis shows that the meaning and emphasis are different in each case.[13] As Lindars points out, " It cannot be simply taken

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12 Peck (1983) p. 85.

13 Paul and the evangelists as well as James and 1 Peter. For further information refer to Houlden (1973) p. 72.

for granted that the command to love one another is the essential moral message of Christ."[14]

Study of the varied Biblical portraits of Jesus does, however, suggest that his ministry was, among other things, characterized by loving activity inspired by great feelings of love for many whom he met. We cannot hope to discover what Jesus really said about anything for certain but as far as we can tell wherever Jesus went he demonstrated and created 'love' through his words and his actions. Perhaps more than any other historical figure Jesus' life was orientated towards extending himself for the purpose of nurturing the spiritual growth of others.

The teachings and example of the historical Jesus are as I have said difficult to uncover if you accept and understand the full complexity of the Bible as an historical document. Ultimately formulating a Christian definition of love comes from serious reflection and continuous effort to learn over the course of a life time. While the Bible is a central resource for Christians in this process, all aspects of human experience are valid resources for formulating a loving Christian approach to life.

I have already stated that the Christian Churches through their representatives the clergy are in the 'business' of being loving. It follows from Peck's definition of love, and from some aspects of the New Testament picture of Jesus, that the clergy should demonstrate their love in active ways for the nurturing of spiritual growth in themselves and in others. One place where Christians can demonstrate an active love in the tradition and spirit of Christ, is through attention by the Christian clergy to the personal function of the funeral.

In order to achieve this aim and demonstrate an active love in the context of the funeral, the priest must place primary importance on the funeral's capacity to give relief from suffering in both the short and long term. At this crisis point in the lives of the bereaved the funeral offers an

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14 Lindars (1975) p. 70.

opportunity for the Christian churches, through their representatives the clergy, to extend themselves for the purpose of nurturing the spiritual growth of the bereaved.

CHAPTER FOUR: MEETING THE NEEDS OF THE BEREAVED AT THE FUNERAL

Once again death's mystery holds us in its arms and we are memoried with a thousand things that ------ was, and is, and now always will be.

- Marcina Wiederkehr[1]

How can the function of nurturing the spiritual growth of the bereaved be achieved at the funeral? The heart of the answer lies in the clergy extending themselves to make the service as therapeutic as possible for the bereaved.

My analysis of the primary function of the funeral is open to criticism on the grounds that it seemingly ignores the essential fact that the funeral is a religious ritual conducted within a theological framework and not just a psychological device in a purely secular context. I have in part, already justified my focus on the personal function through my discussion of the importance of love, as the primary concern of the Christian Churches and ministry. The needs of the bereaved at this crisis point in their lives demand the application of active love shown by the officiant in the service. It is, however, incorrect to assume that I have ignored the theological context and content of the funeral. Rather I have subordinated both to the function of the funeral which deals with the grief needs of the bereaved. By taking this stance I realise that I come into conflict with many members of the clergy who in practice subordinate the grief needs of the bereaved to the theological framework and content of the liturgy.

My aim is not to eliminate the theological content or to ignore the religious context but to make both complementary with the personal function of the funeral, rather than putting them in competition with the

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1 Quoted in, "Through Death to Life," p. 30.

personal function as I believe is happening in many Anglican funerals. Considering the importance of the personal function I believe that this is a vital process. This chapter examines some of the ways this emphasis can be put into practice with particular reference to the contemporary New Zealand Anglican funeral service contained in A New Zealand Prayer Book, (1989).[2]

Preparing For The Funeral

The process of assisting the bereaved with their 'grief work' at the funeral begins a long time before any particular service. Pastoral education about the effects of grief and the options available for a funeral can be an invaluable assistance to the process of grieving as it lays the foundations for the bereaved achieving a funeral which meets their grief needs.

Preaching from the pulpit about funerals, bereavement, and the grieving process is an effective way of making some people aware of the needs which they will have when faced with the death of someone close to them, and of the funeral service as a resource to help them meet those needs. This method, however, only reaches a small minority of the total population. Jackson points out that:

> This should not be an excursion into the unreal or the illusory, but rather an honest, down-to-earth meeting of the problems that the bereaved face. . . That it is as effective in advance of actual bereavement as it is during the actual time of mourning is indicated by the fact that scores of persons have requested copies of sermons preached months or even years before they were faced with acute loss.[3]

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2 There are many issues that could be discussed in this chapter. Due to the restraints of this format I will restrict my discussion to the key factors affecting the personal function of the funeral. These key factors are; participation, centring on the deceased (particularly through addresses), the need for realism, expression of emotions, and content and structure of the liturgy. For discussions on other important but more specific aspects of the funeral and their relationship to the personal function see: Irion (1964), Jackson (1985), Buchanan (1980), Ainsworth (1983). Collectively these deal in some depth with the sermon, scripture readings, music, hymns, prayers, cremation and burial, the relationship between God, death, the deceased and the bereaved and other theological considerations, the role of funeral directors, and continuing pastoral care after the funeral.

3 Jackson (1985) p. 213.

This, and other forms of education for the public which the clergy may have the opportunity to provide, do of course necessitate the Church and the clergy first educating themselves on the grief process and the ways that funerals can assist with healthy grieving.[4] This education needs to be an on-going process consisting not just of classes during clerical training in preparation for ordination but ideally there should be a coordinated programme for the education of practising ministers involved in taking funerals.

It was obvious from my interviews that many priests conduct hundreds of funerals while hardly ever attending funerals officiated at by other priests or even discussing in any depth their approach to funerals with their colleagues. This isolation needs to be removed if there is going to be a widespread improvement in the ways that funerals cater to the needs of the bereaved. Nearly every other profession has means of encouraging the rapid dissemination of innovative ideas among its members through written material, seminars and workshops. Churches need to adopt this approach to a greater extent than already exists for the healthy development of funeral practices and to raise the standard of officiants to a generally higher level.

There is also an issue here relating to who attends the post-ordination training which does exist. Often it is the priests with an interest in the personal function of the funeral who are already conducting funerals competently and wish to extend their skill level. Priests who are less interested in funerals and less effective, for whatever reasons, may not attend. This issue needs to be addressed by the Church authorities.

The process of assisting the bereaved at a particular funeral begins shortly after the death. Normally the priest is informed of the death by the funeral director who will have been asked to contact him or her because of the priest's existing relationship with either the deceased or the bereaved.

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4 By "other forms of education" I am thinking particularly of printed matter such as the pamphlet "Funerals and the Anglican Church" published by the Diocese of Christchurch or the pamphlet by Randerson, R. (1984), "Losing Someone You Love - A Guide For Those Facing Bereavement".

Often this relationship may have only begun when the deceased learnt of their imminent death or because the priest has been recommended to the bereaved by the funeral director when making the preliminary arrangements for the funeral.

In the majority of cases the first meeting between the officiant and the bereaved occurs after the death. Ideally this initial contact takes place as quickly as possible. The priest will then normally arrange to see the family of the deceased, or representatives of the immediate family as a group. Some priests visit the bereaved only once before the service. Others, and this is preferable, visit as close to the death as possible in order to offer sympathy, support, and confirmation of their role as officiant. They then visit again, usually the next day. It is during this second visit when the details of the service are normally arranged with the family.

The purpose of this second visit is primarily to assess what type of funeral the bereaved require in terms of length, content and participation and how different aspects of the funeral can be employed to help them work through their grief. This meeting, hopefully, also serves to convey that the officiant is an understanding, supportive, and competent presence in this time of grieving.

Many priests use the technique of facilitating a group conversation focused on the deceased and the funeral. This assists the grieving process by enabling the bereaved to share their memories and express their emotions as well as providing the officiant with information to be used at the funeral. One priest told me:

> I simply sit with them and as gently and as unobtrusively as I can listen to them and encourage them, not to talk to me but gradually to get them talking with each other. In the process you begin to see very clearly where each individual person in the family is at. Often you detect it by a silence or a kind of false laugh or someone trying to be over-jolly.

Another said that:

> One of the things that I have found out about death is that the less you say the better. So to meet the bereaved is to be there. You are a presence. You don't go in and make all sorts of glib comments. All the 'right things' to say are in fact the wrong things.

The almost unlimited variations on the funeral service can change according to the wishes of the bereaved and possibly the deceased, based primarily on their religious beliefs and experience with death, and the officiant's assessment of how the bereaved are responding in terms of the grieving process (which depends on a number of factors outlined in Chapter Two). The priest ought to respect the wishes of the bereaved and yet remain a guiding expert in funeral ritual. This was expressed by one officiant who said that:

> The thing about a funeral is that you don't argue. Right from the time you go to see the bereaved you don't try to lay on them what you think was right. You listen to hear what they want.

Another priest said that:

> One of my jobs is not to be directive. To help them but not to tell them. To suggest things and say, 'Well what do you feel,' and to stop other people who have no right to take control taking control.

With regard to the funeral arrangements, the wishes of the deceased should be taken into account primarily because of the unease and guilt that ignoring such 'last requests' can bring to the bereaved.

Of course the funeral should never ignore the requests or the personality and life-style of the deceased in favour of meeting the grief needs of the bereaved. Walters suggests a scenario where a young homosexual male dies of AIDS and the funeral is arranged by his conservative parents who disapproved of his sexuality and lifestyle.[5] In this case there is obviously a clash between honouring the life of the deceased and helping the parents cope with the loss of their son. Walters suggests that in this case it is best for the parents to "forgo one's own beliefs and values and arrange the kind of funeral that honours the actual

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5 Walters (1990) p. 115-116.

life of the deceased."[6] People are, however, notoriously bad at laying aside their 'beliefs and values' at the church door like baggage separate from themselves. A more workable answer lies in finding the middle ground between celebrating the life of the deceased and providing a funeral which helps the bereaved with their 'grief work'. This is achieved through diversity of content in the service arranged by the officiant in conjunction with the bereaved. Of course the priest can only recommend and encourage that this is a healthy approach for the parents to take. The final decision ought to be theirs.

There will be a diversity of responses and needs among the individual bereaved which the funeral must try to meet also through diversity of content. For this reason it is preferable if the priest can spend some time talking over the arrangements with individuals as well as with the bereaved as a group. It may also be beneficial to suggest that the family include friends of the deceased in the initial group meetings for the sake of both the friends' grieving needs, which may require some active participation in all aspects of the service including the planning, and for the sake of the depth of the arrangements. One priest whom I interviewed said that friends of the deceased:

> can give me not only a different focus and angle on the person who has died but also tell me various things about the background to the family.

In the case of the young man who dies of AIDS there may be a conflict between the conservative parents and his friends or lover. In this situation the priest may find him or herself acting as arbitrator and conciliator trying to create a funeral which assists both groups with their grief at the funeral, though of course this is not always possible.

The process of planning the funeral with the bereaved must be a detailed one taking many hours if necessary, and covering every relevant aspect of the service. In the case of the contemporary New Zealand

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6 Walters (1990) p. 117.

Anglican funeral service and other services involving liturgy, adequate attention to the personal function of the funeral necessarily involves examining the specific wording of the service with the bereaved with an eye to making alterations. It is doing the bereaved a great disservice for the officiant to assume that they share certain beliefs with the authors of the service or that the bereaved will be comfortable with these ideas being expressed at the funeral merely because they have asked for a Christian service.

There is a danger that the priest tries to spare the bereaved the inconvenience of making detailed arrangements for the funeral and, of course, sometimes, the bereaved are more than happy to pass the responsibility for making the major decisions to the officiant. The arrangements must, however, where the bereaved are able, be made by them in conjunction with the officiant in his or her role as an expert adviser. This active participation by the bereaved is essential to optimising the personal function of the funeral and cannot be avoided without sacrificing some of the healing power of the service.

It is the role of the priest to ensure that the needs and wishes of the bereaved are met at the funeral but also, as an expert on funerals and grief, the officiant has the function of adviser and should make suggestions and recommendations based on his or her experience and an informed assessment of the needs of the particular bereaved. For example, the officiant may perceive that a friend or relative of the bereaved has unfinished ends to the relationship which may complicate their grieving and so may suggest that he or she deliver an address at the funeral on some aspect of the deceased's life. This may serve as a way of involving that bereaved person more actively in the service and giving a sense of completion to the relationship. Whether the person chooses to act on this suggestion is, of course, ultimately up to the person involved and the bereaved as a group; the priest can only suggest and encourage.

The personality of the priest plays a major part in creating those connections with the bereaved. On the whole the representatives of the Anglican Church whom I spoke to struck me as sensitive, caring people. As Reeves points out, "In ministering to the bereaved in the acute period of their grief one of the pastor's main problems is his own discomfort."[7] During the course of my research I was not, because of the sensitivity of such occasions, able to observe any pre-funeral visits between the officiant and bereaved families and friends. For this reason I cannot say whether there are some whose effectiveness in giving aid to the bereaved is reduced either because they are uncomfortable dealing with bereaved people or are possibly uncomfortable dealing with death. If there are priests who feel this way then they must face up to the reasons for their discomfort, which may involve unresolved problems to do with the deaths of people close to them, and seek to overcome them through counselling or some other means for the sake of the effectiveness of their ministry.

The personality of the officiant should never be intrusive during any stage of the funeral process. It was pointed out to me by an officiant that:

> You're really trying to present a loss situation to people in a way that doesn't intrude your own personality. I don't try and sell ---- ---- at a funeral. I'd be perfectly happy if people went away and within half an hour said, 'I don't know who the priest was but that funeral really meant a lot to me.' And if that is achieved then the funeral has been of value but if people go away and say, 'Well that was a great performance by ----- ' I would really be devastated.

Another told me of a funeral which he had to prepare at the last minute but which went very well.

> I can't take credit for that and that is why I talk about the grace of God. You've got to allow God's grace to be part of what you do because you're not doing it as a priest for your own glory or for any pats on the back.

Participation at the funeral

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7 Reeves, in Pine(ed), (1976) p. 188.

Active participation was repeatedly pointed out to me as a key factor in maximising the personal function of the funeral. Participation in all forms helps the bereaved face the reality of the loss and decreases any sense of helplessness they may be experiencing thereby facilitating a healthy resolution of the grief process. As one priest told me:

> I find it very important that they do participate in the service. It's not my service, it's theirs.

The participation I have in mind can take many forms but includes: reciting words such as the Lord's Prayer as a group; singing hymns or songs either as a group or by individuals; delivering a reading or an address; acting as a pall bearer; or placing flowers or other items on the coffin. Generally speaking participation is anything which the bereaved do or say at the funeral, either as individuals or as a group, which helps them in their grief work. Participation of this sort empowers the bereaved in the face of death which they have no control over, and prevents them becoming passive detached observers at an event which they need to become involved in mentally and physically.

One priest who was originally from the United States of America said he felt that the bereaved do not participate in the service very much in New Zealand. He said that, "on the whole they don't adequately participate except in singing hymns and actually being there and saying the Lord's Prayer." Another person I interviewed with a more distinctly New Zealand style told me that people not participating is a problem at funerals he officiates at:

> I hate taking services where they stand, as I say, like drained milk bottles, just looking at me.

The lack of participation may, in part, be due to the emotional trauma surrounding the death and the service. I was told by one interviewee about the death of his own father and how this gave him an insight into the ability of many bereaved to participate in the funeral. He said that:

> When I go to funerals I say, 'Look would any of you like to do anything.' I don't try to force a decision. I let them perhaps reflect on it for a day but I never come on strong because I know that I wasn't able to cope. . . Theoretically participation by people is marvellous but actually in the event you can't demand it because people are not equipped for it.

Most people I spoke to blamed the lack of participation primarily on a general unfamiliarity with the service as it is laid out in the liturgy. Nominal Christians who, overall, make up the majority of those attending funerals do not have a good grasp of when to recite words from the liturgy, when to stand or kneel, and are often unfamiliar with the hymns. It is understandable if when faced with what is a very alien ritual their participation is tentative. As one interviewee said:

> You find that often, if people are not liturgically literate; in that they hold the book upside down and the whole thing is unfamiliar to them, plus the emotion of the whole thing, then it's not always very practical to get them to take part.

The alienness of the funeral service as laid out in the Prayer Book can be countered by the officiant familiarizing the bereaved with the service and particularly the elements of the service which will require their participation. Many priests also produce booklets containing the order of service for a particular service. This avoids the problems which the bereaved often have with following the liturgy in the Prayer Book especially when the priest alters the order and content of the liturgy.

For nominal Christians, however, it is not enough that they are instructed when and where to stand, sit, or sing. Participating in any meaningful sense involves a belief in and commitment to what they are saying and doing. With this in mind the officiant may wish to introduce variations on the old forms of participation or create entirely new forms of participation for the nominal Christian bereaved.[8]

One common way in which participation occurs is through the bereaved giving readings, both biblical and non - biblical, at the service. With regard to the non - biblical readings there appears to be a broad split

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8 Discussed further in Chapter 5.

between those officiants who regularly suggest specific readings that the bereaved may use and those who let the bereaved come up with these resources themselves. One priest who prefers to let them provide their own readings said this retains the focus on the deceased and added that:

> It is better to draw out their contribution rather than giving them a pile of stuff which they are encouraged to adopt. I like things to be spontaneous and in the moment.

My research uncovered several interesting examples of people who created their own rituals of participation. Hardy gives several interesting case studies of variations on funerals taken by clergy designed to assist the grief needs of specific bereaved.[9] These include folk songs being sung, readings from American Indian and Oriental cultures, even an example of a group of football players digging the grave for a deceased team member. The most interesting story of a similar nature told to me during my interviews was one about he death of a young mechanic. Before the funeral a close friend and work-mate of the deceased asked if he could place a spanner on the coffin during the service. This had the double effect of allowing the man to participate and also of personalising the coffin and allowing the bereaved to focus on the body of the deceased and not just on a plain box which could be empty for all they know. The officiant said that the man could do as he had asked and the rigourous cleaning and then placing of the spanner meant a great deal to him.[10]

Beginning the work of grieving starts with acceptance and a facing up to the reality of the death and the inevitability of the separation from the deceased. The funeral clearly marks the fact of the death of the deceased for the bereaved. It is a ritual way to say 'goodbye' and marks the end of the physical presence of the deceased in the lives of the bereaved. This separation by burial or cremation and the acceptance of

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9 Hardy, in Pine(ed), (1976) pp. 132-34.

10 Another form of participation which often means a great deal to the bereaved is acting as a pall bearer. Traditionally this is done by men but if a woman wishes to act as a pall bearer and it is practically possible in terms of her physical strength then this can only be a positive step towards improving the personal function of the funeral.

the reality of death which the whole experience of the service facilitates provides the bereaved with their impetus to begin the grieving process.

Centring on the deceased through addresses.

The officiant should always try to gain an understanding and feeling for the life and personality of the deceased. This understanding needs to be carried over into the service in the form of a focus on the life of that person by both the officiant and the bereaved. I was told by one officiant that:

> The important thing is centring on the person who has died. Sometimes all the other trappings in a service aren't important. What's important to people is basically the fact that they've come to say farewell to the person who has died.

'Centring' on the deceased at a service is achieved to a large degree through the addresses given on aspects of his or her life.[11] As one officiant told me when referring to public addresses:

> Something ought to be said. You can't just dispose of a body. Even in the half-hour or forty five minute funeral with a five to ten minute address you can't do justice to a person's life but you've got to give it a shot. I work on the premise that something must be said.

Public speaking about the life of the deceased is a crucial part of the personal function of the funeral as it achieves several purposes. It forms the core of the element of the service which celebrates and gives thanks for the life of the deceased, which is crucial for bringing to life memories in the bereaved which prevent denial of the reality of the death and facilitate the grieving process. The public remembrance of the deceased also allows the memories to be realistic ones. It should also facilitate, along with other aspects of the service, the release of emotions in the bereaved.

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11 Another way of centring on the deceased at the service is by making the coffin unique. This can be done by placing on it something loved by or symbolic of the deceased. See Walter (1990) p. 125.

Traditionally such addresses have been referred to as eulogies. This is a term that seems to be falling into disuse. One priest explained this to me:

> I don't like talking about eulogies because although you do speak in a eulogistic, if that's the right word, way about people it's not just a eulogy. A funeral address contains much more than just saying that is what the person was like because there are all sorts of other dimensions, other ripples. . . dimensions about life and death as you talk about the deceased so it has a greater depth than just a simple survey of somebody's life.

Another simply told me that he felt that, "eulogy sounds too highfalutin."

The process through which the officiant learns about the life of the deceased becomes particularly important if the bereaved have indicated that they wish the priest to deliver an address outlining some aspects of the life of the deceased. The officiant is normally asked to deliver an address when no one among the bereaved feel capable, for whatever reasons, of delivering it. Sometimes the priest may read addresses which the bereaved have prepared beforehand but do not feel capable of reading themselves.

The bereaved's own assessment of their ability to cope with certain aspects of participating such as delivering an address must always be respected and they should never be pressured into types of participation at the funeral which they feel coerced into. Once again, however, the officiant, in their role as an expert on grief and funerals, must walk a thin line between what the bereaved want and what he or she thinks is best for them.

One priest estimated that the bereaved preferred the officiant to deliver the address in, "a quarter, maybe less," of the funerals he officiated at. Others, however, told me that they deliver an address in the majority of the funerals they officiate at although sometimes this is in conjunction with other people.

One priest whom I interviewed told me that when the address is left up to him:

> You just have to sit with the family and absorb what they are saying, and I try not to write it down. What I do is absorb the character of the person which is the hardest for us. It's easy to tell a person's story but to actually pick up the character of a person and share that well that's very hard.

The same person later told me that:

> The most important thing at the service is to make the people reflect on the person who has died rather than me trying to tell them who the person was. If it's a small enough funeral I'll actually talk to the people to get a response to make sure I'm on the right track.

It is a contentious statement but it often seems superficial and inadequate to hear a priest summing up the experiences and personality of an individual that they have never met. Wherever possible, and the clergy could do more to encourage this, those who knew the deceased and are grieving should deliver the address. Often someone who knew the deceased well, but was not so emotionally close to them as to be unable to speak, represents the bereaved by giving the address. Of course some people very close to the deceased such as parents, children, siblings or close friends are prepared to deliver the address and are capable of doing it without becoming so emotional that they cannot continue.

If the priest is summing up a person's life second-hand then there is a need for honesty. One priest told me that in these circumstances he always says:

> This is what the family told me, or that I didn't know him or her. Honesty is important all the way. You don't play games. I know there are clergy who play games with people. . . talking about a person they don't know and basically fall flat on their face. People have gone to funerals and said, 'That's not the person I knew.'

More than one address on the life and personality of the deceased is best for evoking realistic memories in the bereaved. Everyone has different memories and perceptions of the deceased and it creates a balanced picture if two or three speakers discuss different aspects of the life and personality of the deceased such as facets of their public and private lives or simply reflect on their own personal memories of the deceased.

One way in which this idea of multiple speakers is sometimes achieved is having a period in the service when anyone can simply stand and speak about the deceased and what he or she meant to the speaker. Many priests whom I spoke to said they dislike this system because it can be counter productive if people make overly lengthy or inappropriate comments or if the family don't want certain people to speak. Many of its detractors had, however, never used this format while those who had said that they had no such problems. If such problems do occur then the priest as officiant should have the authority and the competence to ask the speaker to finish and sensitively regain the focus and control in a service.

Realism and Funerals

The funeral can never be an exercise in superficiality by containing sentimental words that say that death is somehow unreal or an automatic transition into a fantasy land. Irion makes the point that such ideas at times represent:

> a sincere, although misguided, effort to convey the Christian meaning of death. Unfortunately all too often it mistakes the death-defying qualities of the Christian faith for death denial.[12]

Several priests whom I interviewed felt that the liturgy had already gone too far in this direction by trying to make the funeral intelligible to everyone. One said that he felt the liturgy, "Seems to say that death doesn't matter, like crossing the equator thing." Another felt that the service presented an idea that:

> No matter who you are, what you've done and what your attitude to God is that everything is OK and that you are going to the grave which is like a big ranch in the sky.[13]

Certainly some of the readings from poetry and prose read at funerals foster this attitude among the bereaved. One reading in

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12 Irion (1977) p. 46.

13 This is related to the issue of how far liturgy should be altered in its meaning and language while still retaining the integrity of its doctrines.

particular included in "Through Death to Life" jars with me for this reason. It is a poem by Henry Scott Holland which begins

Death is nothing at all -

I have only slipped away into the next room.[14]

The funeral as an unhealthy exercise in superficiality and unreality can be furthered by using words and religious beliefs, particularly about the nature of God and death, which the bereaved do not believe or often even understand.[15] Other factors which contribute to an unreal funeral are: making the deceased up to look asleep; excessive numbers of flowers; tremulous music, and artificial grass at the grave side. All these allow the bereaved to minimise the reality of the death and to make a superficial emotional response which complicates the process of grieving.

Denial of the reality of the death and a shallow emotional response at the funeral deprives the bereaved of the opportunity to confront the loss honestly while their grief is validated and supported by others who are also feeling the loss and by the wider community of those involved with the deceased. As I have discussed in Chapter One this support may be sadly lacking at a later date.[16]

As I have indicated the funeral is an opportunity to remember, "celebrate" and give thanks for the life of the deceased. At death the bereaved often find their memories of the deceased focused on the last days or weeks of the relationship particularly where the death was unexpected or there was 'unfinished business'. The funeral is an opportunity to remind the bereaved of the totality of the deceased's life. This is done primarily through their own and other's public reminiscences, times of silence in the service during which personal memories of the

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14 "Through Death to Life," p. 26.

15 See Chapter 5.

16 Pp. 17-22.

deceased are contemplated, and conversations with other participants in the funeral before and after the service.

The deceased must, however, be remembered realistically. I was told that people who have died tend to be remembered as, "A bit larger than life, a bit more golden and a bit more shiny than what they probably really were." This can, however, be taken to extremes. As one priest said, "They can become saints overnight." There is a tendency at funerals to omit references to the more negative sides of a person's life and personality especially in the public addresses.

While I am not recommending a lengthy analysis of the shortcomings of the deceased at the funeral, as this would be counter productive to the whole personal function, public reminiscences on the deceased should attempt to paint a balanced picture of the whole person.[17] This may involve a reference to something less positive such as the deceased's short temper or tendency to be selfish. People whom I interviewed, however, stated that this type of reference is not common. There is a real need for the officiant to encourage this type of balance when discussing the content of the service with the bereaved. The few instances that were related to me where the speakers were more open and balanced in their treatment of the life of the deceased were seen on the whole as positive, often humorous experiences. One priest told me of

> One funeral I remember in a parish where one of the chief lay people in the parish had died and the vicar said that he was 'a pain in the neck' but that was good, that was how most people remembered him, but he said he had other good qualities as well.

Another told me that when he delivers the address about the person's life he doesn't:

> hide any negatives. The last funeral I took I said that at times she wasn't particularly easy to live with or get along with because she was a very strong, independent spirit but I said, 'That's not saying anything derogatory or demeaning about her because that's just

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17 One priest encourages this balanced and realistic view of the deceased not only through the addresses but asks the congregation to think about the positive and the less positive aspects of their relationships with the deceased during the time of silence for remembrance.

> saying that she was a normal human being and we've all got abrasive sides to us I'm sure.'

These examples illustrate that such an approach is often true to the way the bereaved remember the deceased and, therefore, facilitates a healthy sense of reality.[18] Not all examples are so down to earth or obvious as the first one and of course such attempts can generate tensions and do of course have to be handled carefully. Nor should comments on the negative side of the deceased's life ever be delivered in an overtly judgemental way.

Here again the role of the officiant is complex. When someone else is giving the address the officiant has to assess the needs of the individual bereaved, the bereaved as a whole, and the capabilities of the speaker and then encourage and advise the people addressing the group as to content and length. The officiant is, however, not an editor and the content of the address is primarily in the hands of the speaker.

Emotions and Funerals

Acceptance of the reality of the death of a loved one demands a genuine emotional response. The idea that an expression of emotion at a funeral is for many people, although not all, a positive thing was reflected by a member of the clergy speaking on the episode of the television New Zealand programme "Reflecting On Life" dealing with funerals. He stated that:

> It helps the grief, I think, if you are really honest because you are saying what you feel and saying it in a safe place. It is a time to let go those things and I think this helps the healing; it moves the grief on through several phases.[19]

The expression of strong emotions at funerals is not socially sanctioned in our society for a number of reasons discussed in Chapter

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18 An interesting contrast exists here between the frank reminiscences about the deceased delivered at a Maori tangi. This is part of the reason for the extremely low number of chronic grief reactions observed among Maoris who participate in tangis. Refer to Hosking (1985) p. 38.

19 Ivan Smith speaking on "Reflecting on Life", June 23, 1991.

One.[20] No matter how well the service is conducted it is extremely difficult to counteract social conditioning. The "stiff upper lip syndrome" is a response to death and funerals which officiants nearly all try to discourage in the bereaved as in the vast majority of cases it is unhealthy. One priest said:

> I encourage people to show their emotions because people say to me, 'Well I'll try to be strong' or 'good' or whatever the words they use. I say that this is a very sad occasion, if you want to express tears feel free to do it.

Fortunately, most of the priests whom I interviewed felt that attitudes to the expression of authentic emotions in public, by both sexes, are changing and people are becoming more comfortable with the bereaved showing their emotions at funerals. The clergy, however, still have a lot of work to do to counter the belief that stoicism is an appropriate response to bereavement. They can achieve this aim prior to the funeral through education generally and education of the bereaved specifically. While the priest may be very experienced with death and bereavement it is important to remember the words of one officiant:

> I don't tell them how they should feel, that's quite important. I encourage them to feel but I don't tell them how they should feel or when because that's a very personal thing.

Officiants are also becoming more comfortable with the idea that part of their function is to facilitate the release of emotions to a level which assists particular grieving people. I detected through my interviews that many are, however, still uncomfortable with this idea and try to keep the service to some extent emotionally neutral. This is, however, dangerous as Nichols points out when he says that:

> Care-givers, be they professional or laymen, often allow themselves to be trapped into trying to shield and protect the grieved from pain, only to extend and delay the pain to a later date . . . Whereas the grieved person may want withdrawal from reality (who wouldn't?) there is frequently a strong difference between what people want and what they need.[21]

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20 p. 19.

21 Nichols (1975) p. 91.

I am not advocating that the officiant seeks to produce unreal and hyperbolic displays of emotion. This would be as unhealthy as suppressed emotions. The role of the officiant is to judge what level of expression of emotion is healthy for the bereaved in a given situation and then to tailor the service to meet those needs. Of course there will be circumstances when the best thing for the bereaved will be a service which allows them to contain their overwhelming emotions during the service. Making such a decision in conjunction with the bereaved is part of the officiant's job of assessing the needs of the bereaved.

One key way in which the funeral can be made to work on an emotional level is through music. Often the music is simply instrumental; normally organ music or recorded sound. One funeral that I attended which was held for the Reverend Alan Hewson was memorable for its music and included two vocal soloists.[22] Another equally memorable funeral, also for a deceased clergyman, employed a choir. Both these services were given a beauty and depth by the music which they used.

Hymns sung by the whole congregation can also give a funeral this dimension and of course are a means of participating. Hymns do have to be chosen carefully by both the bereaved and the officiant for two reasons. With declining attendance in most churches people are less familiar with hymns with the possible exception of "Amazing Grace" and "How Great Thou Art." There is a danger that other hymns will merely be mumbled by a congregation which gives any funeral an undesirable air of apathy. Secondly, some of the lyrics of hymns imply that death is unreal or a cause for celebration or contain other sentiments best excluded from funerals.[23] This applies particularly to the funerals of nominal Christians for whom a Christian hymn is often inappropriate.

The process of helping the bereaved demands an emotional involvement from the officiant. In order to help the bereaved with their

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22 22 October 1991, St. Christopher's, Avonhead.

23 For example the hymn which begins "Jesus lover of my soul."

grief the officiant needs to enter into and empathise with the emotions the bereaved are feeling at the funeral. There is a Zulu proverb which illustrates this idea when it says, "You can't wipe the tears off another person's face without getting your own face wet."

The content and structure of the service.

One of the key questions which I asked all those people whom I interviewed was whether they thought the contemporary Anglican funeral service has the potential to help meet the psychological needs of the bereaved. Several criticised the service on the grounds of its content. One priest of this sort responded to the question by saying that:

> It does on the positive side but I don't think it does very much on the negative side - the relationships that are unfinished. By that I mean, if it's a lovely elderly grandmother whose main mourners are her grandchildren and they want to think of her as being at rest and peace after a long tiring confinement then it probably does. If it's the death of a husband who was a tyrant to his children and a burden to his wife and a bastard to his business employees and partners then I don't think it fits the situation at all.

He later went on to expand on this by saying that:

> There is a thing in the Psalms called the Lament where people really tell God off. I don't think there is that sort of note in the funeral service either. We give thanks to God for the life of that person but what if I'm really mad at that person for a lot of unfinished business or the despicable way in which he's treated his family or something like that? I can't really tell him off or tell God off. So it's lacking in that sense - in the reality.

Another priest who was critical of the service for similar reasons spoke of feelings of guilt in the bereaved not being dealt with adequately by the service. He said that the service,

> fails to deal with guilt at the time of death. The service deals with forgiveness of the person who has died but doesn't deal with the feelings of those who haven't patched something up or who had bad relationships. The case of a suicide for example inevitably brings huge guilt to the family and friends.

On the issue of content of the service another priest felt that the liturgy failed to meet the needs of people in diverse circumstances. He said that:

> Each one of those situations have different needs which people have, need to be spoken to, and need to be emphasised. Now I can't throw a great blanket over them. The way I covered that accident or that young mother who died was entirely different from the way I covered that person in his ripe old age who led a good life and died happy.

Others also felt that there was a shortage of material in the liturgy to cope with diverse factors concerning the deceased (especially age), and different circumstances in the relationships between the bereaved and the deceased. They also felt that there should be more material specific to the manner of death.[24] A priest whom I interviewed said that:

> Sometimes you feel as though there is a lack of resources at that level . . . again it's a question of entering in at the level of whatever has happened and often you've got to have other material to do that.

The general consensus among those whom I interviewed was that the contemporary New Zealand Anglican service is lacking in some areas with regard to its personal function. One or two were very critical. "They just stuffed it up all the way through." Others were more generous. As one said, "It's an improvement on the very impersonal service of 1928." Yet another said:

> I would like to see what we've got enlarged and enriched through more options but that's not to criticise what we've got because I think what's there is a very useful tool indeed.

Much of what I said in the previous chapter about additions to the service to meet the needs of nominal Christians applies here also. There are many places where resources exist which could be employed to flesh out the liturgy in order to rectify some of its short comings which are outlined above. There is for example a prayer in the Revised Scottish Episcopal funeral rite of 1987 which deals with the issue of unfinished business and guilt. It reads:

> Forgiving God,
>
> In the face of death we discover
>
> how many things are still undone,

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24 Although the Prayer Book does provide additional prayers for certain circumstances (pp. 855 - 63.) and there is provision for a service for the funeral of a child (pp. 847 -52.)

how much we might have done otherwise.
Redeem our failure.
Bind up the wounds of past mistakes.
Transform our guilt to active love,
and by your forgiveness make us whole.
Lord in your mercy
hear our prayer.

This type of concrete treatment of many of the "darker issues" such as guilt and anger (at both the deceased and at God), needs to be included in all aspects of the service not just through prayers. Often officiants touch upon these type of issues in their personal addresses to the congregation.[25] As one person told me, "If these type of issues are not dealt with at the funeral they may never be dealt with and can become a spiritual wound."

It is not possible for me in the context of this thesis to provide an extensive list of such examples. My aim is, however, to identify some of the problems that clergy find in the existing service and to outline the principles that would underlie a decision to include such additions to the liturgy, the primary motivation for such additions being the improvement of the personal function of the funeral motivated by 'love'.

Others were critical of the service because of what they believed to be faults in its structure. Several people pointed out to me that the funeral service resembles a theatrical performance. As in any performance it has its maximum impact on those present when it builds to a natural climax. Nearly everyone identified this climax as the point in the service where the bereaved say 'goodbye' to the physical remains of the person which are then removed.

One priest felt that the service did not acknowledge the need to build to this moment and therefore is "misreading the needs of people."

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25 Few priests refer to these as 'sermons' because they do not really preach in the manner or for the length of a sermon.

He felt that this climax needs to be preceded by the remembrance of the deceased. In his opinion the service asks the congregation to remember the deceased too close to the start.

> It does not build to that moment. That should be a charged moment. The values and sense of wholeness of the group has not been achieved at that early moment in the service.

He also felt that the service made too much use of 'disjointed' bible verses which are just read but which lack any incantational or musical value. Another felt that appropriate readings were sometimes difficult to find for a particular person and that inappropriate readings were therefore used. He said that it is important to remember that the Bible was, "not written as an anthology of readings for funerals and weddings."

Despite identifying these flaws in the structure and content of the liturgy this particular priest still uses the service as it is laid out in the Prayer Book. His justification for this was not only his 'conservative' beliefs in the role of the clergy as officiants at funerals but also that, "People are just getting used to the Prayer Book and I don't want to upset that process by changing the order." He admitted, however to "Trying to make the Prayer Book order work with constant displeasure."

However, the general consensus was that while the service did contain flaws in both its content and structure these could be overcome in practice. One priest summed up the general feeling when he said that:

> The lovely thing about the New Zealand Prayer Book is that it has incredible flexibility. You've got incredible freedom really to do what you like and to use the prayer book as a kind of jumping off point and so I don't think that it has in itself the potential (to meet the needs of the bereaved) I think with a bit of rearranging and juggling you can make it do the job adequately.

The phrase "learning to live with the memory of the deceased," which is found in Lindemann indicates that a full and healthy adjustment to the death of a loved one comes about through assimilation of the experience of that person's life and death rather than through avoiding the memories and grief work. The funeral must encourage this by fostering

the beginning of this process. As I have discussed the service accomplishes this through its structure and content in several major ways: by marking the reality of the death for those present and the end of the physical presence of the deceased in the lives of the bereaved; creating active participation; allowing and facilitating the expression of emotions, and remembering and celebrating the life of the deceased. With reference to its personal function there is, however, in both the liturgy and the celebration of the contemporary Anglican funeral service, much room for improvement.

CHAPTER FIVE: THE CHRISTIAN FUNERAL; WHO IS IT FOR? WHO DOES IT HELP?

> *Therefore, although we have been parted from N none of us need ever be separated from the love of God.*
>
> - *A New Zealand Prayer Book*[1]

New Zealand contains a minority of people who are worshipping, practising Christians. Despite this fact the majority of funerals in our country are officiated at by an ordained member of a Christian denomination and are influenced in form and content by Christian theology.[2] The most important implication of these two facts was alluded to by nearly all the priests whom I interviewed but was expressed most succinctly by one who told me:

> I actually think that the majority of funeral services are not taken for people in the Church. They are not taken for practising, understanding Christians.

In the year ending 31 December 1990, Anglican Churches in Canterbury were the location for 1108 funerals officiated at by Anglican clergy.[3] This figure does not take into account the large number of funerals Anglican clergy officiated at outside Church premises - usually at funeral directors' chapels and crematorium chapels. In line with the religious demography of our society the majority of these funerals involved, as both the deceased and the primary bereaved, 'nominal Christians'. By this I mean people with no commitment to Christian beliefs or practices who nevertheless have a basic understanding of Christian myths and beliefs through the limited contact with Christianity that living in our culture usually provides.[4]

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1 p. 828.

2 It is difficult to obtain a figure for the number of funerals officiated at by clergy of any denomination as a percentage of the total number of funerals as each denomination keeps its own separate records.

3 Official statistics collected and released by Anglican Church House, Christchurch. For 1989 the figure was 1149.

4 This contact comes in many ways including: television; movies; Sunday school; reading parts of the Bible; listening to religious speakers in the street or having representatives from various groups come to

From my research it appears that the majority of funerals conducted by Anglican clergy for nominal Christians are based, to a greater or lesser extent, on the liturgy contained in A New Zealand Prayer Book, (1989). A funeral by a Christian officiant using the liturgy of the Anglican Church for nominal Christians raises the question of whether a Christian funeral can fulfil the function of assisting the bereaved with their grief to any meaningful extent if they lack a commitment to the Christian faith.

This does, of course, immediately raise the question of what exactly constitutes a 'Christian funeral'. I have previously defined the funeral, for the purposes of this study, as a formal religious ritual of the Christian Church, normally conducted by a religious officiant according to several variables, including: the content of the liturgy; the practices of the local Church; the beliefs and style of the officiant, and the needs and wishes of the bereaved.

There is no doubt that the present Anglican funeral service, as set out in A New Zealand Prayer Book, (1989) contains Christian beliefs and practices thoughout. It presents unmistakably Christian views of God and Jesus and expresses beliefs on the nature of life, death, and the afterlife. The liturgy also suggests readings from the Bible, Christian hymns, and addresses prayers to God in the name of Jesus Christ.

As I have explained, and in part illustrated, in the previous chapter many priests adapt the funeral liturgy for nominally Christian bereaved often omitting parts, making additions, and placing the emphasis on certain options so that the more overtly Christian content is de-emphasised.[5] By 'overtly Christian' I mean concepts which in order to be understood and accepted require either an understanding of Christian doctrine and \/or Christian faith.

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your door; attending Church at Christmas or Easter; going to certain weddings or funerals; talking to friends, relatives or acquaintances who are practicing Christians.

5 p. 58.

In all the cases that I have come across Christian officiants will retain some Christian content in the funeral service. Just how much and what type of Christian content is necessary for a funeral service to be deemed 'Christian' is determined by three things: the nature and extent of the alterations; the justification for the alterations (are the alterations motivated by 'love'?); the beliefs of the officiant, and especially the bereaved as to what can be termed 'a Christian funeral'.[6] Each of these factors will be considered in the following discussion.

At this point it is worthwhile considering why it is that people who are arranging a funeral but who have no particular affiliations with the Church choose to have a religious officiant and the Christian content that this normally implies. One member of the clergy told me that people opt for a Christian funeral because:

> When they are face to face with the mystery of death a residual belief in God and Christianity is the only faith they know.

Another expanded on this idea when he said that:

> Our society sees itself as Christian still and there are a lot of people for whom its the only thing they've got to turn to... at that point there is no one else they can turn to.

For most people the mystery of death still demands some type of religious response even in our scientific and secular society and traditionally the Christian Church is where the bereaved turn for this in times of death. This practice still continues even when the deceased and the bereaved have few existing ties with the Church. While there are some secular options for people to turn to for the funeral the Church is the most widely accepted and normally the first resource that people think of at the time of a death.

The majority of people do not arrange their funerals before they die and the bereaved suffering from the shock and stress immediately after the death are likely to take the obvious and traditional option of a Church

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6 These are my own criteria based on my interpretation of the function of the funeral.

funeral especially if it is recommended by funeral directors.[7] Many people are motivated to have Church funerals because it is vital to them to feel that they are doing the 'right' thing on this very important occasion.

It has already been established that the death of a loved one produces in the bereaved psychological needs which may be met at the funeral. From both my interviews and observations of funerals there is no doubt in my mind that a funeral with a large Christian theological content taken for a practising committed Christian, where Christians make up the majority of the bereaved, can be a great assistance in their 'grief work'. This type of funeral is what has been defined in Chapter One as a 'religious' funeral.[8] The religious funeral can potentially fulfil a number of functions, the consideration of which should influence the form of the funeral.

As a service of worship grounded in Christian beliefs it can provide support for the bereaved on two levels. The service can highlight and reinforce the loving concern that Christians believe God has for humanity and in this circumstance particularly for the bereaved. The funeral service can also highlight the fact that the bereaved are part of a congregation who share broadly similar beliefs about God, resurrection etc. This provides both valuable social support and reinforces the doctrinal ideas which are assisting the bereaved with their 'grief work'.

One striking example of a religious funeral was the service held for Allan Pyatt, fifth Anglican Bishop of Christchurch on 28 November 1991, in the Christchurch Anglican Cathedral. The service was loosely based on the funeral liturgy in A New Zealand Prayer Book, (1989) but incorporated other Christian elements provided for in the funeral rite including a Requiem Eucharist and the singing of the Nicene Creed by the choir. The whole service had a feeling of a gathered Christian community supportive of the bereaved. This was strengthened by the ministry of the

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7 Many funeral directors have particular priests they recommend to the bereaved.

8 p. 16.

sacrament of Communion to the majority of those present. The prayers and other expressions of Christian belief such as those contained in Biblical readings and hymns had a relevance and a significance in the context of the lifes of the deceased, the bereaved, and the majority of those present. None more so than the words of the committal where one of the officiants read:

> Now therefore, Allan,
> we commit your body to be cremated,
> earth to earth,
> ashes to ashes,
> dust to dust;
> in the sure and certain hope
> of the resurrection to eternal life
> in Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.[9]

The Pyatt funeral was an excellent example of a religious funeral which, although presenting a Christian hope of life after death, found a therapeutic balance with the presentation of the fact that death had occurred, that relationships had been severed, and that life for the bereaved was now drastically altered. The funeral was also accepting of the feelings of the bereaved, acknowledging the sadness, shock and loneliness which are part of the feelings of grief. This was achieved particularly through the addresses given by one of the officiants and a son of the deceased but also through the prayers and readings. Thankfully, no attempt was made at the service to tell the bereaved that it was wrong for Christians to feel sadness and despair at the death of another Christian.

The officiant's task is different when an active Christian faith was present in the deceased and is present in the primary bereaved than when it is not. For Christians the funeral is in part to remind them of God's

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9 From A New Zealand Prayer Book, (1989) p. 837.

presence in their lives and the life of the deceased in the past, present, and future. Faith in a loving and supportive God and hope for the future through a belief in resurrection allow the bereaved to release the dead and reorganise their lives.[10] For bereaved lacking in a background of Christian faith the entire focus of the funeral needs to be reconsidered.

My research shows that generally the response of officiants who are asked to take funerals for nominal Christian bereaved is that, in line with an understanding of the funeral as a 'pastoral office', they modify the funeral service given for Christians as specified in A New Zealand Prayer Book, (1989). The extent of these modifications varies from priest to priest and from service to service depending on the circumstances. Generally though, for nominal Christians, the scripture lessons and prayers are chosen to be more general than specific, and there is not the same emphasis on the Christian hope of resurrection. This process often involves making additions to the service other than those suggested in the text, selecting appropriate options where options are available or omitting words, lines, or whole sections.

However, some priests officiating at funerals for nominal Christians make few alterations to the liturgy apart from selecting the most appropriate option where options are provided. I encountered several arguments in support of this approach.

It was suggested to me that because, in most cases, the bereaved have asked for a Christian officiant they are expecting and requiring Christian content. As I have pointed out, however, many bereaved have had few dealings with funerals and have come to the officiant because Church involvement is traditional and because there is a lack of widely accepted alternatives. While they may well desire spiritual content at the service in the form of Christian beliefs the form and extent of this content

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10 A study by Parkes (1972) p. 159, showed that the connection between Christian belief and a healthy adjustment to bereavement is not always so simple. Possible complicating factors include: the difficulty of maintaining a view of God as being loving and protecting in the face of untimely bereavement; the possibility of reunion through resurrection does not always help tolerate the loss now; the danger in some cases of over-reliance on God after the death which can complicate and prolong the grief work.

should not be dictated by the limits of the liturgy just because the bereaved have come to a Christian priest.

Normally this first argument is linked to the idea that it is the role of the clergy and of the liturgy to present Christian beliefs and practices in as full a way as possible. In many other circumstances I believe that this is true. The funeral, however, is unique because of its function of bringing relief to the bereaved and so the nature and extent of the theological content should be dictated by their needs.[11]

Priests are sometimes unwilling to make changes to the liturgy because they are uneasy about making an assessment about the religious beliefs of the bereaved. One explained that he would not be prepared to judge whether particular bereaved have beliefs that mean that the Christian content of the funeral would be meaningful for them. He maintained that:

> Just because a person says in their head 'I am not a Christian' doesn't mean that they don't have strong memories, emotions, ties that often go back to childhood.

Related to this argument is the suggestion that most people in our society can relate to the Christian content of a funeral because, as one priest said, "most of us have a culturally acquired understanding of Christianity" so that "elements within that service will meet their needs."

Others also argue that even for nominal Christians the overtly Christian funeral provides them with an appropriate way of 'saying goodbye' and of beginning the process of working though their grief. There were, however, different reasons for this belief among my interviewees. One said:

> Maybe its not the content of the funeral that provides hope and reassurance but the sense that they are doing what is right and done by other people around them.

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11 For a fuller discussion of this issue refer back to Chapter Three on the function of the funeral where I include a discussion on the role of funeral liturgy. (pp. 43-44)

Others thought that the liturgy catered to the needs of both Christians and nominal Christians well. Representative of this opinion is the comment that:

> I think there are elements of it (the liturgy) that are common to all people. I think that the elements of thanksgiving, memories, grief, and committal, the giving up of the person, are common to all people.

It is arguable, however, whether nominal Christians find support in their grief work from the overt Christian content of funeral services. Nor is it in the best interests of the bereaved to conduct a funeral assuming that those without religious conviction can discard the theological elements of the funeral and yet still profit from the social and psychological aspects of the funeral. Such beliefs and practices may even be counter-productive to the integrity of the funeral as an important step toward the healthy resolution of the grieving process. Irion illustrates this point when he says that:

> Elements of hypocrisy in such a pattern can easily make the whole service seem empty of meaning. The conventional funeral in many ways works against the mourning process because it is patently only an appearance, alienated from reality. [12]

Irion argues that it is incorrect to think that nominal Christians can relate to and gain comfort from the expression of Christian beliefs at the funeral because of what he terms, "the disjunction between the symbols of the Christian funeral and the capacity for reception in persons who have no viable commitment to the faith. . . ."[13] The idea that there is a 'disjunction' between the presentation of Christian beliefs at the funeral and the understanding of the bereaved was reflected in my own research. One priest who was particularly strident on this point told me that he became "extremely angry" when a funeral service did not reflect the beliefs of the bereaved in favour of following the liturgy and retaining much of the overtly Christian content. He told me that for nominal Christians:

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12 Irion (1977) p. 169.

13 Irion (1977) p. 135.

> We can put on a beautiful Christian charade with all the right words but I don't think the words are understood, and even when they are understood, accepted. I don't think that is the job of the ministry or the Church.

Another said that he believed that the liturgy is "essentially for Christian mourners and what other people make of it I don't have the faintest idea at times." This sentiment was echoed by another officiant who said:

> I think I saw in the latest statistics that probably about 60 or 70 percent are in the don't know or don't have any religion category and I think in the liturgy we are asking the people to parrot words which, one, they don't believe or, secondly, they are not going to experience, which is not a helpful thing.

Another was more blunt. When asked whether the overtly Christian content of the funeral liturgy was reaching nominal Christians he simply said, "I don't think it is meaningful to them at all."

To illustrate this point further it will be useful to consider the funeral liturgy's presentation of the doctrine of resurrection. The religious funeral and the help it provides to the bereaved are integrally connected to the Christian hope of resurrection. The opening words of the liturgy make this point strongly. They read:

> . . . and to comfort those who mourn
>
> with our sympathy and with our love;
>
> in the hope we share
>
> through the death and resurrection
>
> of Jesus Christ.[14]

Another key reading in this regard is one which almost directly follows the greeting: from John 11:6, it reads:

> I am the resurrection and the life;
>
> even in death
>
> anyone who believes in me, will live.[15]

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14 A New Zealand Prayer Book (1989) p. 827.

15 Ibid.

While the hope for a new life after death which these examples illustrate is a key element for the personal function of a 'religious' funeral references such as these become merely hollow words when said to the majority of nominal Christian bereaved.

Several priests said, however, that they are hesitant to make assessments about the religious beliefs of the deceased. While the liturgy contains a message that resurrection is for committed Christians they still talk about resurrection at the funeral of an ostensibly nominal Christian. As one said:

> I'm not in the business of second guessing God. I'm not in a position to define somebody else's belief.

But how can a message about the Christian hope of resurrection be expected to have a relevance for the bereaved at a time of great stress and sorrow if they do not really understand its meaning? If they do understand them it is often the case that they do not believe that the words apply to the deceased or to themselves. Including such references to resurrection can introduce a note of unreality into the service. This in turn can produce psychological detachment in the bereaved instead of the mental and emotional alertness which comes from a belief that the funeral has a relevance and a basis in the lives of both the bereaved and the deceased.

However, the argument is still compelling that it is, after all, a Christian service and, therefore, its structure and content should be primarily influenced by the beliefs and practices of the Christian (in this case Anglican) Church. One priest summed up the perspective of this study in response to this argument when he said:

> It's all very well saying 'Well it's a Christian service' but that's not the point of it. That's not their point of need at that particular time. They (nominal Christians) have a need to be able to express their grief and give thanks for the life of that individual.

This focus on the needs of the bereaved brings me back to my arguments in Chapter Three concerning the primary function of the funeral. Funerals are, as I have said, a 'pastoral office' the primary

function of which should be the assistance of the bereaved toward a healthy adjustment to the death of a loved one. If emphasis is placed on the personal function of the funeral the officiant must give him or herself licence to make changes to the existing liturgy. As one officiant said, with regard to

> . . . the 'personal services', marriages and funerals, I believe very strongly that one's ministry is to the people that are there and, therefore, it's OK to change things and miss things out

This is the same priest who is quoted in Chapter Three as saying:[16]

> You have to do quite major surgery to the service to provide something that actually speaks to where those people (nominal Christians) are at.

What then becomes of the argument that part of the 'impressive' function of the funeral liturgy, is to present the bereaved with a Christian perspective of life and death and so educate and perhaps influence them toward becoming Christians? This was an argument that I encountered regularly in my interviewing. While no one suggested what one priest referred to as, "Ramming Christianity down their throats at the funeral," there was a general understanding that when people go through a crisis such as bereavement they re-examine their beliefs and attitudes. One priest in a poetic moment compared the nominal Christian bereaved to thirsty people and the Christian message as a cool drink. He told me that:

> If a person is thirsty I like to offer them the chance of a drink of water. Whether they take it is their own choice. Then, at least, they have seen there is a drink of water before them.

Just how this "drink of water" is presented at the funeral is the key issue. If Christian beliefs are the basis for most aspects of the service, including the greeting, prayers, hymns, readings, and other expressions of belief about the nature of life and death then surely the service is more like an overwhelming Christian baptism than a refreshing drink. I agree with the priest who told me that:

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16 p. 42.

> It is not appropriate, or even possible to teach them (nominal Christians) the Christian super and sub-structure of what they are doing at the funeral. What is important is to meet their particular needs.

Another interviewee made the point that nominal Christians have "come for a Christian burial although they haven't come for a doctrinally Christian burial." The only way that a priest can meet this need is through personalising each service to the circumstances, beliefs, and needs of the bereaved. Each service needs to be discussed to as full an extent as possible with the primary bereaved so that it contains theological ideas which they can understand and accept or have, at the very least, said they are happy about having expressed at the service.

In most circumstances this will leave the funeral service with what one advocate of this approach termed, "a lightly Christian content." I believe that this is acceptable as long as there are no additions that are directly contradictory to Christian beliefs, i.e certain beliefs from other religions such as statements implying a belief in reincarnation, and the officiant is satisfied that the funeral still has a basis in Christian beliefs. The most important reason, however, for believing that these alterations are acceptable is because they are motivated by the officiant, acting as a representative of the Church, having a desire to nurture the spiritual growth of the bereaved. They are motivated by 'love'.

It was pointed out to me that the nominal Christians are often assisted in their 'grief work' by having overtly Christian ideas presented at the funeral on the basis of the priest's own faith. Instead of, for example, following the words of the greeting in the liturgy strictly and saying, "In the hope we share through the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ," the officiant may say, "In the hope which I have. . . . This more honest and realistic approach can in part meet the bereaved's requirement for a religious dimension to the funeral and yet maintain some of the overtly Christian content of the service.

Reducing the doctrinal content of the funeral may ironically also be the best evangelistic method. It was explained to me that:

> If people feel understood and ministered to on their level they are more likely to think seriously about Christian commitment. If they find something alien to them and alien to the person who has died then they will not be interested in the church.

There are those, however, who believe that the Church should make no compromises between the religious funeral and the funerals of nominal Christians by producing any form of service with reduced Christian content or emphasis. Grisbrooke, for example, argues that the service should not be, "Some vague half-Christian rite which can be used over the bodies of vague half-Christians."[17] He is particularly concerned that decisions to alter the service to meet the needs of nominal Christians, decisions which are at present made by some officiants, will in the future be formalised in the liturgy itself. He argues that;

> A Christian liturgy of committal must, by definition, be a liturgy to be used by Christians for committing the souls and bodies of departed Christians - practising, worshipping Christians.[18]

Grisbrooke and others of a similar opinion, such as Irion, and at least two of those whom I interviewed, strongly believe that attempting to produce funerals and funeral liturgy which are intelligible to nominal Christians is a danger to the integrity of Christian doctrine and the Church. The 'watering-down' of the doctrinal content of the service means that these parts of the funeral become 'meaningless' and "totally inadequate."[19]

One interviewee told me that the conventional funeral gave a misleading and doctrinally incorrect impression to the bereaved about the nature of death for people with no commitment to Christian beliefs. He believes that the conventional funeral fosters the presentation of the idea that:

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17 Grisbrooke (1970) p. 68.

18 Ibid.

19 Irion (1977) pp. 133-35.

> no matter who you are, what you've done, and what your attitude to God is, that everything is OK and that you are going to the grave which is a big ranch in the sky which is like a camp.

Further to this he said that:

> I would love to say that there is a second chance but there is not and there's no grounds for believing there is. . . Rather than speaking negatively of pain and judgement I don't speak at all because I believe that the scripture, which is the basis of my Anglican faith, the scripture says that without a trust in the Lord Jesus there is nothing but a facing of God as a Judge.

The proposed solution by those who see the conventional funeral as an unacceptable compromise is in most cases that there be a frank acceptance of two distinct types of funeral; 'religious' and 'humanistic'.[20] The humanistic would include many of the dimensions and functions of the religious funeral without, however, the Christian theology. This type of service could incorporate some philosophical or spiritual elements of the bereaved's choosing. Such a funeral has the potential to meet many of the grief needs of the bereaved in several ways including: providing supportive relationships; reinforcing the reality of the death and giving a sense of finality; sanctioning the expression of authentic feelings; conveying meanings about the nature of life, death, and relationships.[21]

While I have a lot of sympathy for the argument that ideally funeral services should be divided between the religious and the humanistic, as an argument it does in many ways avoid the issue. What the Church has to adapt to in our secular society is the fact that it is faced with an enormous number of requests for burials for nominal Christians. The idea of a 'humanistic' service is only viable if the concept of a humanistic funeral was widely accepted in our society; the bereaved generally were better informed about funerals and knew what type of funeral they wanted, and the facilities and officiants for such funerals existed in large numbers.

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20 Another option is the 'life centred funeral' which is popular in Australia, particularly in Melbourne where it is estimated 1 in 8 funerals use this approach. The funeral is conducted by a secular celebrant and focuses entirely on the deceased and what he or she meant to the bereaved. The service excludes any references to theological or philosophical beliefs about the nature of life and death. This service is less adequate in meeting the needs of the bereaved than the humanistic funeral because death demands a response in depth which is excluded when the transcendental is declared a taboo topic. For further information refer to Walter (1990) Chpt. 20.

21 For a fuller discussion of the 'humanistic' funeral refer to, Irion (1977) pp. 189-200.

Unfortunately none of these conditions exist in New Zealand at the present time.

The fact is that little infrastructure exists for officiating at and constructing funerals outside the Christian church. Also people in the initial stages of grief are too tender to be given the strict options of either 'religious' or 'humanistic'. The very expression 'nominal Christians' implies that many people fall somewhere between these two options and, therefore, require a funeral which reflects the nature of this middle ground.

The challenge for the Church and the clergy is to demonstrate an active love to the best of their ability. The clergy are a group of often skilled and experienced funeral officiants whom people are turning to for assistance and comfort in a time of great need. There is an onus on the clergy to provide this help to the best of their ability.

Understandably Christian Churches wish to maintain the integrity of their doctrines. The funeral, however, presents a unique set of circumstances. Nowhere else do large numbers of distressed people use the services of the clergy, often the buildings, and a ceremony of the Church. The help they receive at this time is often crucial to their continued mental well-being.

A far more realistic solution to the problems which some see surrounding the conventional funeral, rather than a strict segregation between religious and humanistic funerals, is that the Church provide a far wider range of options in its liturgy.

The 1989 Anglican liturgy already contains a number of options and many priests and interested observers believe that these should be expanded to cater to the needs of nominal Christians.[22] These should be

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22 There is some precedent for such additions in the existing marriage liturgies (A New Zealand Prayer Book 1989, pp. 777 - 808.) which, due to their nature as a 'pastoral office' and use by a large number of nominal Christians, closely resemble the funeral liturgy. The Prayer Book provides three diverse forms for

constructed and would be employed primarily with the personal function of the service in mind. As one priest told me, he would like to see alternatives, "within the same format, based on an understanding of where people are at."

Alternatives to the existing content of the funeral liturgy in A New Zealand Prayer Book should exist for most aspects of the liturgy. Such additions would of course be selected by a liturgical review committee taking submissions from interested groups and individuals. There are three areas in particular where alternative forms already exist but need to be extended for the sake of nominal Christians; the prayers thoughout the service, the Commendation, and the Committal. Two criteria need to be given priority in the selection of alternatives to these and other parts of the existing liturgy. Firstly alternatives should reflect in general terms the nature of the religious beliefs of nominal Christians, and secondly the words must assist with the 'grief work' of the bereaved.

Among other things alternatives should help the bereaved focus on the deceased and the reality of his or her death and the normality of their own grief. Additions should also address the nature of the death, and the circumstances of the life of the deceased. For example, the accidental death of a young person and the death of an elderly person after a long illness can produce very different responses in the bereaved which should be further addressed in the liturgy. The content of the liturgy should also more fully acknowledge feelings of ambivalence or unfinished business that some bereaved may be experiencing with regard to the deceased. Feelings of guilt need to be encompassed in the same way.

Examples of the type of form and content which could achieve these aims can be found in, among other places, literature, both poetry and prose. While I am not suggesting these be co-opted directly into the liturgy without alterations this type of material could be adapted into prayers or words of consolation and understanding in the liturgy. The

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the liturgy which through differing emphasis in part reflect differing levels of commitment to Christian beliefs in the people being married.

sentiments they contain are certainly applicable. Many such pieces are already being used by some clergy in their own preparation for services and as resources for the bereaved.[23]

As an example, one piece of writing which achieves many of the functions I mentioned above is "In Memoriam" by Shirley Holzer Jeffrey.

But thank God for the intangibles -

The impact of his/her life on ours.

We remember:

- smile
- frown
- quizzical look
- love
- courage
- hurt
- sorrow
- significant moments
- fun times
- searching times
- moments of risk
- great time of affirmation

As long as we live

We will bear the imprint

Of that influence.

He/she opened many doors for us -

Doors to whole sets of meanings.

We will forever be sensitized

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23 Circulating among some Anglican clergy in Christchurch is an anthology of such material which includes Biblical and non-Biblical material as suggested readings for funerals. It is entitled "Through Death To Life - Selection form for the prayers, readings and other texts to be used in the Mass of Christian Burial".

As to the importance of life.

Because of . . . we will live differently.[24]

Another piece of writing by the same author both instructs and reassures by reflecting something of the nature of grief and conveying to the whole congregation the need for loving support for the bereaved at this time.

Sorrow:

It hurts deep down inside.

One feels diminished,

Less than he has been.

Empty,

Bereft -

Forlorn and incomplete.

But if someone is there

To share the feeling

It becomes endurable

And in the scheme of things a time of being

That includes great emotion

and thus a time of closeness,

Growing and becoming someone more

Than we have been before.[25]

These are only two examples from an enormous range of material expressing ideas which could meaningfully and usefully be incorporated into the existing funeral liturgy. While intended primarily for nominal Christians such material does of course have the potential to meet the needs of Christian bereaved at 'religious funerals'.

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24 Quoted in E. Kubler-Ross (1975) p. 141.

25 Ibid.

Of course, because of the flexibility which exists in the officiants' application of the liturgy alternative greetings, remembrances, commendations, readings, prayers, and committals are happening at funerals all the time. This on-the-spot flexibility will always be a positive factor as it allows each service to adapt to the unique circumstances and needs of particular bereaved.

It would also be a positive step if the options in the prayer book were extended to include many for nominal Christians. These would act as a guide-line and suggest a standard of pastoral care for officiants. They would also exist for the benefit of those officiants lacking experience, those who feel compelled by their beliefs about the nature of liturgy and the role of the clergy to only use the material set out in the prayer book, and those who for various reasons would like to but do not feel themselves capable of altering the liturgy in order to more satisfactorily meet the needs of the bereaved.

CONCLUSION

It has long been recognised that the funeral can play an important part in assisting the bereaved with their 'grief work.' It was Saint Augustine who said that:

> the elaborations that go with burial are rather comforts to the living than helps to the dead.[1]

The study of grief resulting from bereavement has shown how important these 'comforts to the living' can be. At some time we all suffer from the many painful emotions resulting from the death of someone to whom our life has been linked. For some the funeral is a key factor in achieving a full and healthy adjustment to the death of a loved one. The funeral can achieve this by aiding in the positive assimilation of the deceased's life and death into the life of the bereaved. The mental and physical illness associated with not dealing with grief is well-recorded and given that there are many factors in our society which hinder the healthy working through of grief the funeral is an important step in this process.

In New Zealand the 'elaborations that go with burial' are primarily within the realm of the Christian clergy. Many priests whom I interviewed shared Augustine's opinion about the main purpose of funerals. They, therefore, held the view that the priest's role in the funeral should be viewed primarily in terms of pastoral care.

The perception that the primary function of the funeral is its 'personal function' is held by myself and many of those whom I interviewed for two reasons. First because of an understanding of the fact that those bereaved who participate in a funeral rite orientated towards helping them in their grief work make a better adjustment to bereavement than those who do not. Given how important the funeral can be in the lives of so many bereaved its personal function must be given primary

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1 Quoted in Walter (1990) p. 115.

importance ahead of theological or social aspects.[2] The second reason for giving primary importance to the personal function of the funeral is because of the belief that the Christian churches and clergy should primarily be concerned with 'love.' By giving attention to the personal function of the funeral the clergy can demonstrate an active love in the tradition and spirit of Christ.

It is not an easy task for a priest to be introduced to a varied group of distressed people for whom he or she must prepare a ritual which will assist them in their grief. The priest must try to gain an awareness of what the people are experiencing in terms of their grief, and then act as a facilitator to link the funeral to their needs. This is done by both allowing them the freedom to include elements and participate in ways that are meaningful for them, and by advising them on aspects of the funeral that they may not have considered but which may be appropriate and useful.

Participation by the bereaved in the funeral is a vital part of the personal function of a funeral and should be encouraged but not insisted on by officiants at a funeral. Participation helps the bereaved accept the reality of the loss and reduces normal feelings of helplessness. It takes many forms but includes giving addresses and readings, singing and acting as a pall bearer, and creating their own rituals of participation.

Another important aspect of the personal function of the funeral is centring on the deceased. The funeral is a celebration of the life of the deceased and should be grounded in the memories of their existence which the bereaved have. It is up to the priest to create a ritual which draws out realistic memories both publicly and privately.

Ideally a funeral should also allow the expression of genuine emotions by the bereaved. This can be facilitated by the structure and content of the funeral. Emotional response to death is however diverse and there is no 'correct' emotional response at a funeral.

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2 Although it is not exclusive of these aspects.

The majority of funerals in our society are for nominal Christians with nominal Christian bereaved. The majority of these people are, however, still using the Christian clergy and Christian content and structure at their funerals. This practice gives rise to a need to distinguish between two types of funeral. There exists the 'conventional funeral' which is arranged with a Christian officiant, content, and structure but only due to attitudes and customs and not because the deceased or the bereaved have any strong belief in the Christian faith. In contrast there exists the 'religious funeral' where both the deceased and the primary bereaved have a commitment to the beliefs and practices of the Christian church to which they are affiliated.

The content and structure of the existing Anglican liturgy contained in A New Zealand Prayer Book (1989) deals quite well with the grief needs of the bereaved at a religious funeral. However the same service deals poorly with the needs of nominal Christian bereaved. Given the large number of conventional funerals taken by Christian clergy in New Zealand this is a serious issue.

The failure of the existing Anglican liturgy to deal adequately with the grief needs of nominal Christian bereaved means that many priests make, often substantial, alterations to the service. With nominal Christians many officiants discuss specific wording and make numerous omissions and additions which leave the service as 'lightly Christian.' This is done in line with an understanding of the funeral as a 'pastoral office.'

Most priests whom I interviewed felt that the existing Anglican funeral service could be improved in both content and structure. Ideally the existing liturgy should be expanded so that it contains alternatives to meet the needs of a variety of bereaved within the same format. It also needs to be expanded so that it deals more fully with the feelings of guilt and anger which often accompany bereavement. The structure needs to be reworked to allow the service to build to the remembrance and the parting with the body.

Many of these things are being done in practice already but I am concerned that the personal function of the funeral is not seen by enough priests as the primary function of the funeral. This needs to become an almost universal understanding among the clergy so that people can be helped during this traumatic time in their lives, and so that Christians and Christian rituals become a relevant and dynamic force in the lives of as many people as possible. I am left with the words of Paul Irion who said that:

> Many of the ceremonies and rites of the church have become devoid of meaning to people because of their lack of concern with human needs. If they are allowed to become rites which are performed only for the sake of themselves, without due recognition of individual needs and an effort to meet those needs, they can hardly be expected to become significant events in the movement of the spirit of God into the lives of men.

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